

The Byzantine-Türk alliance from 563 to 628: Political and Economic repercussions on the Balkan and Middle Eastern frontiers of Byzantium



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A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a stylized, cursive script followed by a long horizontal line.

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Abstract

During the sixth century the Byzantines were engaged in long, protracted wars against the Persians. The peace treaties were precarious and violated by both parties. Thus, the Byzantines forged allies with people in the east in order to gain an advantage in warfare with Persia. The appearance of the Türks as potential allies in 560s was a welcomed opportunity for the Byzantines, since they could exploit the Türks' enmity towards the Persians, who had acquired common boundaries after their joint attack on the Hephthalite Empire. Despite their coalition, the Türk- Persian relations collapsed when the Persians refused to co-operate with them in silk trade, afraid of losing the monopoly of it. Consequently, the Türks having under their control the northern silk route proposed the Byzantines a silk trade agreement and a political alliance regarding their common enemies, namely the Persians.

The Byzantine-Türk alliance had practical results not only in the Middle East but also in the Balkans, against another common enemy, the Avars. The latter provoked the Türk enmity not only because they fled away from the Türk yoke but also because they dwelt near the western frontiers of the Türk Khanate. On the part of the Byzantines, the Avars shattered the balance of power along the northern border of the Empire since they subdued the people who lived there and launched devastating attacks on the Balkan provinces.

Thus, the particular Master thesis aims at providing a thorough description, explanation and understanding of Byzantium's relations with the Türks. It focuses on analyzing the importance of the Türk tribal confederation (Khanate) in the decision making and strategy planning of Constantinople, as regards its stance towards the Persian Empire and the Avar Khanate. Another parallel objective of no less significance is to explore the economic dimensions of that alignment with regard to the regional trade network to the north of the Black Sea not only in the Balkans but also in the Middle East, where the key factor in Byzantium's plans, was Sassanid Persia. Additionally, it is examined how the Türk Khanate affected balances, both in the Balkan and the Middle Eastern frontier, what influences it exerted on the mortal struggle between the Avar Khanate and Byzantium in the Balkans and to what extent

it affected the way the last Byzantine-Persian war evolved, given the total collapse of the Sassanid Empire and its inability to demonstrate resistance to Arab Muslim armies.

Preface

The main goal of the particular Master thesis is to present and evaluate the political and economic repercussions of the period 563-628 on the Balkan and Middle-Eastern frontiers caused by the Byzantine-Türk relations. In order to achieve the particular objectives the research method of the present assignment consists of two main approaches. The first one concerns the study and examination of the necessary primary sources (mainly Byzantine sources, as there are very few other non-Byzantine sources containing information on this particular period and on the subject). Every available information in the sources is distilled and classified according to its importance on the treatment of the subject. The second parallel – and equally important – approach is the research on secondary bibliography that has treated the subject (or subjects peripheral to it) so far.

Despite the fact that the Byzantine- Türk contacts influenced the reactions of players both in the Balkan and the Middle East frontier zones of Byzantium, as proven by the written sources, literature on Byzantine history of the last decades of the 6th century and of the first decades of the 7th century mainly focuses on the empire's relations with the Persians or with the Avars. Also, while there are great works that paved the way for the Central Asia studies regarding the ethno-genesis of the Türk people and the establishment of their khanate- such as these of P. Golden¹ and D. Sinor², the memorable study of Chavannes *Documents sur les Tou – Kiue (Turcs) occidentaux, recueillis et commentés, suivis des notes additionnelles*- with the exception of few works (papers or monographs), in Greece and abroad, the majority of scholars of Byzantine history have not dealt with Byzantine-Türk alliance and its impacts on Eurasia. In Greek literature there were not many attempts to survey the Byzantine – Türk contacts in the pre-Islam era with the exception the joint study of Γ.Κ. Λαμπράκης and Φ.Ν.Πάγκαλος³. However, a more thorough research has been done by Στ.

¹Eg. *An Introduction to the History of the Turkish Peoples* 1992, *Khazar Studies* 1980, *The Turkic Peoples and Caucasia* 2003 are some of the sources of the present study.

² Eg. *Inner Asia. History-Civilization-Languages* 1969, *The Establishment and Disolution of the Türk Empire* are some indicative titles that are also used extensively in the present study.

³ Λαμπράκης Γ. Κ. - Πάγκαλος Φ. Ν., *Έλληνες και Τούρκοι στον 6ο αιώνα. Πρώτη Ελληνοτουρκική επαφή. Ιουστινιανός, Ιουστίνος Β΄, Μπου – μιν Καγκαν (Διλιζίβουλος)*, Αθήνα, 1934.

Κορδώσης in his monograph *Οι Τούρκοι ανάμεσα στην Κίνα και το Βυζάντιο*. Despite the scant research data in Greece, he examines in depth the relations of the Türks with China and Byzantium, the two sedentary empires located on the two edges of Eurasia and the political and economic developments on the particular area due to these contacts. Also, the monograph *Το Βυζάντιο και οι Άβαροι (Στ'-Θ αι.)* by Γ. Καρδαράς offers a global view of the Byzantine-Avar relations and conflicts from the sixth to ninth century.

So, based on the aforementioned literature the paper is divided into three chapters and an introduction, which includes some preliminary remarks on tribal, linguistic and national connotations of the ethnonym *Türks* and a brief account concerning the rise of the Türk khanate. In the first chapter there is a short presentation of the most important sources which deal with development of the bilateral relations between Byzantium and the Türk Khanate (563-628). The second chapter, which is the largest and the most significant, is divided into 10 sub-chapters in alignment with the embassies that were exchanged between the Byzantines and the Türks and the political background of the sixth and seventh centuries. The third chapter presents the political and economic repercussions of the Byzantine-Türk alliance on the Balkan and Middle Eastern frontiers of Byzantium. Finally, there is an attempt for an overall evaluation of the particular alliance (conclusion).

Contents

Acknowledgements.....	iii
Abstract.....	iv
Preface.....	vi
Contents.....	viii
Primary sources.....	xi
Bibliography.....	xiv

Introduction

1. Note on the usage of the terms Türk, Turkic.....	1
2. The rise of the Türk tribe.....	3

Chapter 1

Eastern Roman Sources on the Türk Khanate

1. Note on Eastern Roman Sources on the Türk Khanate	
1.1. Medieval Greek Sources.....	6
1.1. a. Menander Protector.....	6
1.1. b. Theophylactus Simocatta.....	7
1.1. c. Theophanes Confessor.....	7
1.1. d. Theophanes Byzantius.....	8

1.2. Medieval Syriac Source.....	8
1.2.a. John of Ephesus.....	8
1.3. Medieval Armenian Source	9
1.3. a. Moise de Calankatouts or Movses Dasxuranci.....	9

Chapter 2

The Byzantine- Türk diplomatic exchanges

2.1 The 563 embassy of Kermichíōnes.....	10
(According to Theophanes Byzantius and Theophanes Confessor)	
2.2 The 567 Türk embassy to Byzantium.....	17
(According to Menander Protector)	
2.3 The 568 Byzantine Embassy to the Türks.....	23
(According to Menander Protector)	
2.4 Embassies between Byzantines and Türks until 576.....	31
(According to Menander Protector)	
2.5. The 576 Byzantine embassy to the Türks and the brief breach of the Byzantino-Türk alliance.....	34
(According to Menander Protector)	
2.6. Possible Byzantine embassy to the Türks in 579	44
2.7. Possible Byzantine embassy to the Türks in 584.....	46
(According to John of Ephesus)	
2.8. The letter of the Türk khagan to emperor Maurice.....	48
(According to Theophylactus Simocatta)	

2.9. Brief note on the origins and the appearance of the Khazars in the Eurasian steppes.....	53
2.10. Byzantine contacts with the Türks until 626 and its final (victorious phase).....	56
(Military alliance against the Persians, through the Khazars)	

Chapter 3

The political and economic repercussions of the Byzantine- Türk alliance

3.1 Brief note on Byzantine Diplomacy.....	64
3.2 Repercussions on Economy.....	65
3.3 Political Repercussions on the Balkan front.....	71
3.4 Political Repercussions on the Middle Eastern front.....	75

Conclusions.....	80
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Maps	83
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Introduction

1. Note on the usage of the terms Turk(s), Türk(s), Turkic.

Like almost every ethnonym, that of the *Turks* has multiple meanings and dimensions. This is largely due to the fact that from its appearance as a tribal name to its present form as the nationality of the inhabitants of modern Turkey and as a general linguistic appellation of a group of peoples and nations, the term *Turks* has been used in multiple ways by various historiographic traditions and has connoted groups of people or groups of languages that were (or are) neither identical nor concurrent. This has created multiple layers of historical meanings of the ethnonym, some of which are convergent, while others divergent. On top of that, modern nationalism, especially as it is propagated in Turkey, tends to lump together these multiple meanings, treating them, more or less, as a homogenous material that historically has led to modern Turkey (this tendency is called Pan-Turkism). This is perfectly understandable from the point of view of politics, since modern *Turks* – as every other nation in the world – project their current unity to the past refusing to see the historical differentiations or variations of the multiple meanings of the term *Turks* or that linguistic affinity does not imply national identification (either in history or in present time). More than that, such an approach to the multiple meanings the term *Turks* facilitates Turkey's political aims vis-à-vis other peoples, that belong to the same language family, namely the Turkic nations, and has also been used by other Powers in modern competition in Eurasia.

In History (as a science), though, one has to be precise and see through national (or nationalistic) narrations and political goals. Over time this principle has led to some subtle variations as regards terminology about the *Turks* and their history, in a number of languages. For example, despite the fact that in English the term *Turks* has a double meaning (on one hand it means the inhabitants of modern Turkey and on the other it refers to the peoples belonging to the Turkic sub-group of the Altaic

languages group)⁴, the adjectives Turkish (for the first case) and Turkic (for the second case) have been produced and extensively used in bibliography, especially during the past few decades.⁵ Obviously, this reflects the need to discriminate between what pertains to modern Turkey and modern Turks and what can be ascribed to a wider, non-national category of peoples speaking closely related languages, of which the modern Türks are just a branch; in addition, it could signify something that pertains to one of the Turkic nations, but not particularly to the Turkish nation.⁶ Similar semantic distinctions have been produced in Russian and Chinese.⁷

The initial, historical tribe of the Türks that formed a vast nomadic empire in the 6th - 7th century and engaged in diplomatic relations with Byzantium, Persia and China lent its name (through complex historical processes⁸) to a group of peoples speaking related languages and to a particular modern nation, namely the one residing in modern Turkey. Yet, this does not mean that the Türks of the 6th century are the forefathers of every Turkic nation or the spring from which Turkic nations multiplied and became populous. After all, there were Turkic tribes and nations (in the strict linguistic term) that existed before the appearance of this historical tribe or concurrently with them in History and in the sources (and this also applies to the linguistic forefathers of modern Turkey – the Oghuz⁹). It is for these reasons that it was decided that the initial tribal name of the Türks be written with a ü-umlaut, to distinguish them from the broader linguistic group and from the modern nation and to avoid any unnecessary political misunderstandings.

⁴ *Britannica World Language Edition. New Practical Standard Dictionary*, Funk&Wagnalls, New York, 1954 for the entry *Turk*: “*Turk noun* 1 A native or inhabitant of Turkey; an Ottoman. 2 One of any of the peoples speaking any of the Turkic languages, and ranging from the Adriatic to the Sea of Okhotsk: believed to be of the same ultimate extraction as the Mongols. 3 Loosely, a Mohammedan. 4 A Turkish horse.”

⁵ *Britannica: Turkish*: “*adj.* 1. Of or pertaining to Turkey or the Turks. 2 Of or pertaining to the Turkic subfamily of Ural-Altaic languages, especially to Osmanli. – *noun* The language of Turkey; Osmanli.” *Britannica: Turkic*: “*adj.* Pertaining to a subfamily of Ural-Altaic languages, or to any of the peoples speaking any of these agglutinative languages”.

⁶ Findley2005, 6: “To put in another way, the image of a bus travelling to Turkey facilitates discussion of what is Turkish – now conventional scholarly usage in English for the people, language, and culture of the Turkish language – but does not include all that is *Turkic* – the corresponding term applicable to all Turks everywhere, including the Turkish Republic”.

⁷ See for those Κορδῶσης 2010, 62-77.

⁸ See for those Kordoses 2012, 29-40.

⁹ Κορδῶσης 2011, 49-64.

2. The rise of the Türk tribe

The origins of the Türks¹⁰ is covered by the mists of History. Their ethno-genetic legends are preserved in the Chinese dynastic annals and give contradictory evidence¹¹. Nevertheless, many scholars¹² believe that the Türks were an independent branch of the Hsiung-nu¹³ with the family name the A-shih-na clan. It is claimed that the Türks with other Southern Siberia tribes came into northern China after the fall of the Hsiung-nu Empire (220)¹⁴. In the course of their migrations they came in contact with Iranian and Tokharian population, which is evident in some remnants of their earliest language¹⁵. In the middle of the fifth century they became subjects of the Rourán¹⁶ who brought them to the Southern Altay region where they became the blacksmiths of their overlords¹⁷. How or when the process of state formation took place is not recorded, but the composite character of the Türk nation is beyond any doubt¹⁸. The A-shih-na clan (maybe not have been of Türkic origin, as its name depicts) had under its rule tribes of different origins, some of whom were speaking Turkic languages dialects creating –at least according to some scholars-a common culture¹⁹.

The Türks made their appearance in the mid-sixth century. After putting down a T'ieh-lê rebellion against their overlords²⁰, their leader, Boumin requested an imperial bride as a

¹⁰It is likely that the word *türk* meant powerful, mighty in the Old Turkic. In the Chinese sources the *Türks* were called Tujue which according to a folk etymology, denotes "helmet" due to the fact that the Altay mountains where the Türks were located looked like a helmet See Golden 2011, 48, Roux 1998, 69. The Türks in the Orkhon inscriptions were named *Kök Türks* (Talât 1968, 263-264) which is said to mean Celestial or Blue. This is consistent with the cult of heaven, the superior God to whom the Shamanists Türks believed at the particular era. See Giraud 1969, 7.

¹¹ See Sinor 1990, 287-288; Sinor- Klyashtorny 1996: "According to the Chou shu, 'No doubt the Türks are a detached branch of the Hsiung-nu, an opinion taken over verbatim by the Pei-shih. But the Chou shu also relates another tradition according to which the Türks 'originated in the country of So, located north of the Hsiung-nu'. Since the location of So cannot be established, the information is of little use and simply shows that, according to this 'other tradition', the Türks were not a part of the Hsiung-nu confederation".

¹² Findley 2005, 21; Klyashtorny 1994, 445; Parker 1895, 177; Golden 1992, 118; Roux 1998, 70

¹³ Parker 1895, 177; Roux 1998, 46-47; Erdal 2004, 2.

¹⁴ Golden 2011, 44.

¹⁵ The name of the A-shih-na or the personal names of the first Khagans are not Turkic. See Sinor 1990, 290 and 1996, 325-326. Klyashtorny (1994, 446-447) suggests that the Chinese A-shih-na is the transcription of Khotan-Saka *âşşaina/âşşena* meaning *blue*. In the Orkhon inscriptions the people who found and inhabited the empire were called *Kök Türks* meaning *blue Türks*. Therefore, he claims that it is likely that either the *Kök* is the Turkic translation of A-shih-na or *Kök Türks* can be translated as the *Köks and the Türks*, which designates that both element came together with the founding of the state.

¹⁶ The origins of Hsiung-nu is a controversial issue since there are scholars who believe that they were Proto-Mongols see(Grousset 1970, 104) and others who claim that they were of Türk origins. See Roux 1998, 47 and Clauson 1960, 122:

¹⁷Sinor 1969, 101.

¹⁸ Sinor 1996, 325.

¹⁹ Golden 1992, 126.

²⁰ Golden 1992, 127.

reward for his services. When the Róurán Khagan²¹, Anagui haughtily refused to give his daughter to his *blacksmith slave*²², Boumin turned to the Western Wei, one of the states of the dismembered Chinese North²³, with whom he had already come in contact since 545²⁴. The Western Wei dispatched a royal bride to Bumin in order to seal their alliance with the Türks against the Róurán who were their common enemy. The Türks empowered due to Western Wei alliance took advantage of the Róurán's internal strife and revolted against them (552²⁵). By the mid-550s the Róurán were shattered by the Türks.²⁶

On the death of Boumin, the government of the newly founded Türk Empire was divided between his son, Muhan (553–572) and his brother, Ishtemi (553-576). Muhan ruled over the eastern parts of the Empire and had the primacy of the two halves while Ishtemi yabghou²⁷ was in charge of the western parts of it. Thus, from the outset the Türk Empire was bifocal²⁸. Both rulers extended the frontiers of their state by launching a series of military campaigns. In the east they defeated the Kitans and incorporated the Kyrgyz into their realm²⁹. In the west the Türks concluded an offensive alliance with the Persians against the Hephthalites (557)³⁰ which was sealed by the marriage of the daughter of Ishtemi with Khosro³¹. Then, both allies crushed the Hephthalite state at the same time and divided its lands (560)³². The river Amu-Darya became the common border of the two empires³³. The Türks took the territory of Sogdiana while the Sassanids subjugated the lands to the south of Amu-Darya river (Bactria)³⁴. Apart from territorial gains the Türk-Persian alliance was beneficial for parties in other ways, too. The Persians managed to get rid of a mighty enemy who launched attacks on their eastern provinces, while they could sell large quantities of silk to Byzantium without having the Hephthalites as their competitors. The Türks, also, gained the control over the Northern silk route through their conquests and increased the possibility

²¹ For the title of khagan see Grousset 1970, 104, Σαββίδης 2002, 427.

²² Chavannes 1969, 221-222; Κορδώσης 2012, 74. Zhang Xu-Shuan 1998, 284.

²³ Kyzlacov 1996, 322.

²⁴ Cahun 1896,42; Κορδώσης 2012, 73

²⁵ Chavannes 1969, 222; Kyzlacov 1996, 323.

²⁶ Chavannes 1969, 250; Golden 31. Sinor (1996, 326-327 and 1997a, 101) believes that the overthrow of the Róuráns' rule was a result of a lower class' struggle against the ruling class waged by the Türks who were employed as Róuráns' blacksmiths.

²⁷ For the title yabghou see Chavannes 1969, 219; Christian 1998, 251.

²⁸ Sinor 1969, 103; 1990, 298; 1996, 327.

²⁹ Parker, 1986, 181-182, Escedy 1968, 134.

³⁰ For the Hephthalite-Persian conflict before the Türk-Persian alliance see Σαββίδης 2006α, 68-70.; Κορδώσης 2012, 72.

³¹ Christensen, 1971 380; Golden 1992, 128-127.

³² Chavannes 1969, 226; Grousset 1970, 127; Κορδώσης 2012, 83; Sayili 1982, 18; Σαββίδης 2006α, 68-75.

³³ Chavannes 1969, 222-223.

³⁴ Harmatta, Litvinsky 1996, 359.

of direct contact with the most important silk consumer, Byzantium³⁵. It is possible that these conquests reveal the Türk interest in silk trade since Boumin had already tried to establish relations with China and after the Türk expansion the international commerce was stimulated³⁶.

Nevertheless it was a short-lived alliance. Despite Türks' efforts to establish trade relation with the Persians, the latter made clear that they were not willing to let the Türks establish commercial footholds in their country and share with them the profits derived from silk-trade. Therefore the Türks decided to bypass Persia and established direct links with Byzantium which was an inimical enemy of Persia. Consequently, through a frequent exchange of delegations, the Türks and the Byzantines were determined to act jointly in order to annihilate Persia in military and economic terms.

³⁵ Κορδώσης 2012, 367; Sinor 1969, 104-105.

³⁶ Beckwith 1993, 178-179.

Chapter 1

Eastern Roman Sources on the Türk Khanate

1. Note on the Eastern Roman Sources on the Türk Khanate

The Eastern Roman Sources that provide the scholar with information on the Early Türks can be roughly divided into two categories; historians and chroniclers and secular and ecclesiastic historiographers. Another classification which intersects the previous one is based on the language in which the sources are written. Those which are written in Medieval Greek and those written in other languages of the Eastern Roman Empire, such as Syriac or Medieval Armenian. The sources that were more frequently used for the particular study are: *The history of Menander the Guardsman*, *The History of Theophylact Simocatta*, *Chronographia* of Theophanes Confessor, Theophanes Byzantius' account preserved in *Myriobiblos*, *The Third Part of the Ecclesiastical History of John Bishop of Ephesus* and *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*.

1.1. Medieval Greek sources

1.1. a. Menander Protector

Menander's work called *History* is preserved fragmented in *Excerpta de legationibus* and *de sentetiis* of Constantine Porphyrogenitus and in *Suda*. His work begins where the previous historian Agathiae Myrinaei stopped (557/558) up to 582, which is the end of the reign of Tiberius I³⁷. His compilation abounds with information on nomadic peoples of the western Eursian Steppes, such as the Kotigurs, Otigurs, Hephthalites and Türks whom he calls with their contemporary names, avoiding classical anachronisms such as Huns or Scythes³⁸. Also, Menander saves information on the Byzantines' relations with the Türks and the Persians as well as some backstage insight, a fact which shows that he had access to reports of the people who were

³⁷ Καρπόζηλος 1997, 456; Menander 1985, 3.

³⁸ Καρπόζηλος 1997, 457.

protagonists in these affairs³⁹. The language he uses in his work is a mixture of scholarly and colloquial medieval Greek and it includes many technical as well as Latin terms⁴⁰.

1.1. b. Theophylactus Simocatta

Theophylactus Simocatta's *Historia*, covers the period of Maurice's reign (582-602 μ.X.) and continues the work of Menander Protector. There are not known any personal details except for he came from Egypt. In his historical account there are two topics which prevail: the warfare against the Slavs and the Avars in the Balkans and the fight against the Persians on the eastern front⁴¹. Despite the fact that his works suffers from many weaknesses such as inaccuracy in chronological order, lack of coherence in the narration of events, it is important because of the lack of sources concerning the particular period of Byzantine history⁴². Simocatta, as Menander, preserves much information regarding the initial stages of the nomadic empire of the Türks.

1.1. c. Theophanes Confessor

His most known work is *Chronographia*, that is the narration of events from the reign of Diocletian to the second year of the reign of Michael I (covering a period from 285-813). His work reflects the iconophile point of view and is the most important source for the period of iconoclasm⁴³. It also describes the campaigns of Emperor Heraclius against the Persians and his alliance with the Khazars, who were a Turkic tribe subordinate to the Türks⁴⁴. Theophanes conveys the information that in the year 563 a delegation from the depths of the East, dispatched by the king of Kermichíōnes, Askel. These Kermichíōnes, according to Theophanes Byzantius, is the Persian rendering of the name of the Türks⁴⁵.

³⁹ Καρπόζηλος 1997, 457-458.

⁴⁰ Καρπόζηλος 1997, 458.

⁴¹ Καρπόζηλος 1997, 478.

⁴² Καρπόζηλος 1997, 480-481.

⁴³ Καρπόζηλος 2002, 117.

⁴⁴ For the Byzantine- Khazar rapprochement see Balogh 2005, 187-195.

⁴⁵ Theophanes Confessor, 239.

1.1. d. Theophanes Byzantius

There are no biographical information on Theophanes Byzantius. Although his work has not survived, Patriarch Photius includes in *Myriobiblos* an account of Theophanes' work. His history covers the period from 565 up to 582⁴⁶. Theophanes is important for a piece of information he conveys, concerning the Persian rendering of the name of the Türks. The Türk origin of Kermichiones is verified by the fact that Byzantius mentions that the particular tribe sent gifts to emperor Justin in order that the latter refuse accepting the fleeing Avars (he misplaces the event in the reign of Justin and not Justinian). He also verifies that the know-how of the cultivation of silk-worms came from Seres⁴⁷.

1.2. Medieval Syriac Source

1.2. a. John of Ephesus.

The bishop of Ephesus was born in Amida of Asia Minor in the beginning of the 6th century. Despite the fact that he was considered as the representative of the Monophysite ecclesiastical fraction views, he was chosen by the emperor Justinian to undertake a campaign of conversion among the pagans and heretics still flourishing in Asia Minor⁴⁸.

His most known work is the *Ecclesiastical History*, a work which consisted of 3 parts. Of these, the first one has been totally lost, while the second was preserved embedded in the work of Dionysius Tell Mahre (in the 3rd part of his chronicles⁴⁹). The third part of John of Ephesus's work, which is more important for the Turks was found in a monastery in the desert Skete, in Egypt near the border with Libya.

John of Ephesus makes a reference to Zemarchus' delegation to the Türks⁵⁰. However, the most important piece of information he provides the modern reader with is that when on 584 the Avars sacked Anchialus, (modern Bulgaria) and the

⁴⁶ Καρπóζηλος 1997, 452.

⁴⁷ Theophanes Byzantius, 1-4,270-271.

⁴⁸ Harvey 1990, 29.

⁴⁹ John of Ephesus, vi.

⁵⁰ John of Ephesus, 45-49, 425-428.

emperor was preparing the capital for a long siege, the Avars were forced to retreat to Sirmium due to attacks on their rear by the Turks⁵¹. According to John of Ephesus the Avars were obliged to buy off the disengagement of the Turks by paying 8 Kentinars of gold (1kentinar=100 litres, 1litre of gold=325 gr of gold) (260 kgr of gold). This confirms the information of the other Byzantine sources that the Byzantines had concluded a political, financial, military treaty with the Turks that also had affected the Balkan front.

1.3. Medieval Armenian Source

1.3. a. Moise de Calankatouts or Movses Dasxuranci

Written in the Medieval Armenian language Movses Kalankatouts or Dasxuranci's⁵² work, called "The History of the Country of Albania" is a historical compilation about Caucasian Albania consisting of three volumes⁵³. The second book covers the period between the mid -sixth and the mid- seventh century and narrates the Khazar invasions in Northern Armenia⁵⁴.

According to Movses, the Khazars entered Aghavanie (southern modern Armeina) led by the Khan Dschéboukan himself and his son, and sacked Tchog and Barda, the latter being the capital of medieval Albania (Armenia). In the process, the Khazars entered Georgia and besieged Tiflis, which was their rallying point with Heraclius' armies⁵⁵.

⁵¹ Καρδαράς 2010, 72.

⁵² Hacikyan 2002, 17: "The attribution of a single author was ruled out...there are at least two authors, one in the seventh century who begun the *History* and another in the tenth century who completed it."

⁵³ Howard-Johnston 2006, 49.

⁵⁴ Hacikyan 2002, 170.

⁵⁵ Movses Dasxuranci, II.11-12, 81-91.

Chapter 2

The Byzantine- Türk diplomatic exchanges

2.1. The 563 embassy of Kermichíōnes

(According to Theophanes Byzantius and Theophanes Confessor)

Apart from the alleged Byzantine Embassy to the Türks (553), mentioned in Kül Tegin Inscription on the occasion of the death of their Khagans Bumin and Ishtemi⁵⁶, Theophanes Confessor refers to the arrival of a Kermichíōnes' embassy in 563 sent by their king Askel at the Byzantine court. Unfortunately, Theophanes Confessor provides us with limited information concerning the delegation⁵⁷. He only mentions the name of the people *Kermichíōnes* and to the place they lived *ἔθνους πλησίον τοῦ ὠκεανοῦ*, which cannot help to locate them precisely in a certain geographical context. As a result of that the identification of Kermichíōnes has been a matter of controversy among the scholars, since there is no agreement on the origins of these people.

In the Pahlavi tradition the Hephthalites were called *Xyōn* (o) and were distinguished between the *White* (*spēd*) and *Red* (*karmīr*) *Xyōn*⁵⁸. But a further difficulty lies in the fact that the name *Xyōn* is almost identical with the name of Chionites, a tribe probably of Iranian origin that dwelt in Bactria and Transoxania in late antiquity. Ammianus Marcellinus makes a reference to them in connection with the Sasanian emperor Šāpūr II who spent the winter of 356-57 AD in their territory⁵⁹. Moreover, the same historian mentions that Chionites were serving in the emperor's army⁶⁰ probably after having been defeated by his forces. They also participated in Šāpūr's siege of the byzantine city of Amida (359) as they were attacked on the eastern

⁵⁶ There is no solid evidence that the particular embassy took place see Κορδώσης 2004, 437-439 and Kordoses 2009, 18, 25-26.

⁵⁷ Theophanes Confessor, 239: «τῷ δ' αὐτῷ μηνὶ ἦλθον εἰς Κωνσταντινούπολιν πρέσβεις Ἀσκήλ, τοῦ ῥηγὸς Ἑρμηχιόνων, τοῦ ἔσωθεν κειμένου τοῦ τῶν βαρβάρων ἔθνους πλησίον τοῦ ὠκεανοῦ».

⁵⁸ Sinor 1990, 301.

⁵⁹ Ammianus Marcellinus, 16.9.4, 241-242.

⁶⁰ Ammianus Marcellinus, 17.5.1, 333.

part of the wall⁶¹. However, according to Sinor, the Chionites, as they were described by Marcellinus, cannot be identified with Hephthalites. It is probable that some of their descendants were later integrated in the Hephthalites' empire⁶².

Macartney in his effort to resolve certain issues concerning Byzantine writers' references to Turkic nations of the sixth century claims that Kermichíōnes cannot be the Tujue (Türks) since the first Türk embassy came to Constantinople in 568 and the Avars had already been negotiating with the Byzantines for a permanent settlement inside the empire's frontier from as early as 558 A.D.⁶³. Furthermore, their ruler's name was *Ἀσκήλ* or according to Corippus⁶⁴, Scultor, while the Türk Khagan at that time was Silzibul or Ishtemi⁶⁵. In addition, taking into account Theophanes Byzantius who describes Kermichíōnes as the Türks, *formerly called Massagetae* and Menander who calls the Tujue Türks *formerly called Sakae*, he concludes that Kermichíōnes inhabited the territories where the Massagetae used to live, namely on the river Jaxartes and the lake Aral, while the Tujue lived further east in the homes of the old Sacae⁶⁶. As a result of that he identified Kermichíōnes with the abovementioned Chionites who ruled over in the Jaxartes-Aral district⁶⁷. Furthermore, the same scholar argues that Kermichíōnes may also be identified with the Ogurs, who had moved westward in the fifth century and they were known to the Persians with their old name "Kermichíōnes" while the Türks who subdued them on the Volga region knew them as Ogor⁶⁸.

Chavannes believes that the Kermichíōnes were actually the Pseudo-Avars. Contrary to other scholars he interprets Theophanes Byzantius⁶⁹ as followed: although Massagetes and Türks are not the same people they inhabited the same territory successively⁷⁰. This could mean that the Kermichíōnes might be the Róurán who were the real Avars and preceded the Türks. Thus, as the Varchonites (Pseudo-Avars) had

⁶¹ Ammianus Marcellinus, 19.1.7-19.2.1, 473-477. In these paragraphs the historian describes not only the siege but also the death of their king's son and the subsequent funeral ceremonies.

⁶² Sinor 1990, 301; Macartney 1944, 271; Κορδῶσης 2012, 89.

⁶³ Macartney 1944, 271.

⁶⁴ Corippus 1976, 3. 390-391, 72.

⁶⁵ Macartney 1944, 272.

⁶⁶ Macartney 1944, 272.

⁶⁷ Macartney 1944, 273.

⁶⁸ Macartney 1944, 274.

⁶⁹ Theophanes Byzantius, 2, 270: "Ὅτι τὰ πρὸς Εὐρὸν ἄνεμον τοῦ Τανάϊδος Τοῦρκοι νέμονται, οἱ πάλαι Μασσαγέται καλούμενοι, οὓς Πέρσαι οἰκεία γλῶσση Κερμικίωνάς φασι."

⁷⁰ Κορδῶσης 2012, 90: The aforementioned argument has been questioned.

appropriated the name of the real Avars, they had also taken the name of Kermichíōnes by which the Persians designated the Róurán, namely the real Avars. Therefore, the embassy of Kermichíōnes had been sent by Pseudo-Avars. Moreover, he identifies the delegation of Askel with the Avar embassy, which according to Menander Protector came at the Byzantine Capital in 562 in order to look over for the tribe's permanent settlement⁷¹. Chavannes goes even further as he agrees with de Boor when the latter replaces the word *βαρβάρων* with *Ἀβάρων* in Theophanes' text⁷².

However the identification of the two embassies could not be possible. First of all, the Avars defeated by the Türks fled westwards, away from the supremacy of their masters and in 557 they reached the territory of the Alans to the north of Caucasus⁷³. From there they sent their first delegation to the Byzantine court⁷⁴ (558). By 562, they had advanced to the Lower Danube from where they dispatched the second embassy of 562 to Justinian I. So, the Avars' fleeing westwards does not coincide with what Theophanes Confessor mentions that the embassy of Kermichíōnes was sent from the vicinity of the Ocean, *πλησίον τοῦ ὠκεανοῦ*⁷⁵. Moreover, in the case that the Avar delegation of 562 was identified with that of 563, Theophanes Confessor would have at least associated the delegation of 563 with the first Avar embassy⁷⁶ of 558. Indeed, Theophanes was very descriptive concerning the arrival of the first Avar embassy at

⁷¹ Menander, fr. 5.4, 50-53.

⁷² Chavannes 1969, 232.

⁷³ Καρδαράς 2008, 237-238; Καρδαράς 2010, 32; Szádeczky-Kardoss 1990, 206-207.

⁷⁴ Καρδαράς 2010, 37; Σαββίδης 2006, 144; Beckwith claims that the Avar embassy of 558 was actually Turkic: "In 558 the first Turkic embassy reached Constantinople, seeking the remaining Avars who had not submitted, as well as a trade alliance with the Eastern Roman Empire". Beckwith 2009, 116.

⁷⁵ Geographical knowledge had not been developed since the time of Strabo. So, people believed at his particular time that land, which was surrounded by the Ocean, was extended to the east up to India namely little further from the places where Alexander the great had reached cf. Κορδῶσης 2012, 93. Moreover the chronicler Priscus, who described the great Eurasian migrations of the fifth century mentions that people inhabited the shores of the Ocean were obliged to emigrate on account of excessive mists from the Ocean and a great plague of gryphons. Due to this migration the Avars were driven from their homes and caused the Sabirs to leave their abodes. The Sabirs in turn expelled the Ugors, the Onoghurs and the Saraghurs from their territories between 461 and 465 causing them to migrate to the Caucasian and Pontic regions. Priscus, 104; Macartney 1944, 266; Szádeczky-Kardoss 1990, 206.

⁷⁶ Κορδῶσης 2012, 89.

Constantinople, as the Byzantines flocked to see the Asian visitors with their weird appearance⁷⁷.

As a result of that, most of the scholars, claim that the delegation of 563 is Türk⁷⁸. Sinor, following Theophanes Byzantius, suggests that the Türks were called Kermichīōnes by the Persians possible due to the fact that they had incorporated in their empire the *Red (karmīr)* Hephthalites⁷⁹. Moreover, the name *Askel* was attributed indifferently to the tribe or the ruler of the tribal group of the Western Türks called by the Chinese Nushih-pi, since it was the original form of the name of this first tribe of the Turkic confederation⁸⁰. In addition, Theophanes Byzantius makes clear that the delegation was Türk as he recorded the purpose of the mission to convince the Byzantine Emperor not to give a permanent settlement to Avars⁸¹, who were previously Türk vassals. Therefore, it is likely that the newly formed Türk empire aimed at identifying the Byzantine intentions concerning the Avar issue⁸², which would define their future relations.

Nevertheless, there seems to be some doubt as to when the first Turkic delegation was dispatched to Byzantines since Theophanes Confessor and Theophanes Byzantius differ. According to the first account the first Türk embassy came to Constantinople in the thirty-sixth year of Justinian's reign while the latter claimed in Justin's time (565-578). As a result of that one of the two historians must have been inaccurate on the date of the arrival of the first Turkic envoys.

Although Theophanes Byzantius is fragmented and quoted by Photius he gives us more information concerning the delegation⁸³. As it was mentioned above Türk envoys, the so-called Kermichīōnes in the Persian language, were presented to the

⁷⁷ Theophanes Confessor, 232: "τῷ δ' αὐτῷ χρόνῳ εἰσῆλθεν ἔθνος ἐν Βυζαντίῳ παράδοξον τῶν λεγομένων Ἀβάρων, καὶ πᾶσα ἡ πόλις συνέτρεχεν εἰς τὴν θέαν αὐτῶν, ὡς μηδέποτε ἑωρακότες τοιοῦτον ἔθνος. εἶχον γὰρ τὰς κόμας ὀπισθεν μακρὰς πάνυ, δεδεμέναις πρηνδίοις καὶ πεπλεγμέναις, ἡ δὲ λοιπὴ φορεσία αὐτῶν ὁμοία τῶν λοιπῶν Οὐννων".

⁷⁸ E.g. Frye 2001, 179; Κορδῶσης 2012, 88-94; Parker 1986, 439; Sinor, -Klyashtorny 1996, 332; Sinor 1990, 302.

⁷⁹ Sinor 1990, 302.

⁸⁰ Sinor 1990, 302.

⁸¹ Theophanes Byzantius, 2, 270: "Καὶ αὐτοὶ δὲ ἐν τῷ τότε δῶρα καὶ πρέσβεις πρὸς βασιλέα Ἰουστίνον ἔστειλαν, δεόμενοι μὴ ὑποδέξασθαι αὐτὸν τοὺς Ἀβάρους. Ὁ δὲ τὰ δῶρα λαβὼν καὶ ἀντιφιλοφρονησάμενος ἀπέλυσεν εἰς τὰ οἰκεῖα".

⁸² Κορδῶσης 2012, 92.

⁸³ Theophanes Byzantius, 2, 270: "Τοῖς δὲ Ἀβάροις ὕστερον ἐλθοῦσι, καὶ Παννονίαν οἰκῆσαι καὶ εἰρήνης τυχεῖν δεόμενοις, διὰ τὸν πρὸς τοὺς Τούρκους λόγον καὶ τὰς συνθήκας οὐκ ἐσπέισατο."

emperor Justin with gifts to request not to give asylum to Avars. The Emperor after having received the ambassadors and rewarded them with gifts, he let them return to their home. As it is known, the first Türk embassy that came to Constantinople during Justin's reign was the one headed by Maniakh in 567. But, despite the fact that Menander gives a detailed account of the embassy of 567 and its return, he only lists two points as the result of the Byzantine –Türk agreement: the decision to circumvent the Sasanians and bring silk over the steppe route to the Byzantine markets and the making of Byzantine-Türk alliance against the Persians⁸⁴. Consequently, there is no reference concerning the Byzantine response to the Avar request for land.

Thereafter, Theophanes mentions that when the Avars came to request for peace and Justin's permission to settle Pannonia, the emperor refused to cede the particular land to them due to his agreement with the Türks. Very briefly, the Avars⁸⁵ had sent three delegations to the Byzantine court before their permanent settlement in Pannonia (567). Consequently, the Avars after their arrival at the land of Alans⁸⁶ dispatched an embassy to Byzantines (558) to request alliance⁸⁷. According to their proposal, the Avars would protect the empire's frontiers from the imminent enemies in exchange for gifts, annual pension and fertile lands in which to settle⁸⁸. Justinian I, unwilling to battle, urged the newcomers to make an alliance with Romans and fight against their enemies⁸⁹. He accepted to offer gifts and annual subsidies but he did not cede them land.⁹⁰ Indeed, the Avars acting as *foederati* responded to the emperor's message and defeated the Onogurs, the Zali and the Sabirs, who were Hunnic tribes⁹¹.

⁸⁴ Frye 1943, 179; Κορδώνης 2012, 138.

⁸⁵ Menander, n. 19, 252: "...Theophylactus (VII.8.3-6) insists that the Avars known to the Romans were False Avars, being in fact two tribes, the Uar and Chunni (cf. Menander fr. 19.1 where the Turk chief refers to them 'as my slaves Uarchonitae') who had taken the name of the Avars, formerly the most feared people of Scythia. ...". Καρδαράς 2010, 32-35.

⁸⁶ The arrival of the Avars at the land of Alans, north of Caucasus is usually dated to 557/8, while Blockley (Menander, n. 19, 253) prefers 559/560. See also Bury 1958, 315; Καρδαράς 2010, 37.

⁸⁷ In 557 almost after the coming of the Avars, the king of the Alans Sarus, acting as mediator, had notified to the imperial commander of Lazica the desire of the Avar Khagan to enter in to communication with the Emperor. Menander, fr.5.1, 48-49, Bury 1958, 305; Obolensky 1971, 48; Σαββίδης 2003, 43.

⁸⁸ Menander, fr.5.1, 48-49; Obolensky 1971, 48;

⁸⁹ Menander, fr.5.2, 50: "whether the Avars prevailed or were defeated both eventualities would be to the Romans' advantage".

⁹⁰ Menander, fr.5.2, 48-51.

⁹¹ Menander, fr.5.2, 50-51 and n. 23, 253; Obolensky 1971, 48.

Having subjugated the Antae of Bessarabia and advanced already to the lower Danube⁹², the Avars dispatched a new embassy (562) to restate their request for permanent settlement⁹³. While the emperor was planning to settle the tribe on the eastern Pannonia⁹⁴, the Avars were willing to live only in Minor Scythia. Justinian I rejected their request to settle there as he was afraid that the Avars would launch attacks from Minor Scythia to the rich pasture lands of Thrace⁹⁵. Since the envoys' demands were not fulfilled they were allowed to leave having received the accustomed gifts⁹⁶.

At the beginning of Justin II's reign⁹⁷ (565) the third Avar delegation was dispatched to the Byzantine court, in order to request more money as a tribute in exchange for the tribe's service as guards of the empire's frontiers. Justin II, determined to put a stop to the humiliating policy of buying off the northern barbarians, did not retreat to their claims although their speech, both pleading and threatening⁹⁸, intended to intimidate the young emperor to pay the tribute⁹⁹. The Avars, having realized that they would not be given what they had demanded and received during Justinian's reign, they chose to go off to the land of Franks¹⁰⁰. Therefore, they moved on to Pannonia. There, the Avars allied with the Lombards¹⁰¹,

⁹² Καρδαράς 2010, 40.

⁹³ One of the envoys revealed to Justin, the son of Germanus, who was in charge for the Journey of the Avar delegation to the capital, that a treachery was intended. Thus, he advised Justinian to detain the envoys as long as possible, since the Avars would not attempt to cross the Danube until the envoys had departed. See Menander, fr.5.4, 50-53; Bury 1958, Vol. II, 315; Καρδαράς 2010, 41; Κορδῶσης 2012, 139.

⁹⁴ Menander, n. 28, 153: "Justinian wanted to settle the Avars in the part of Pannonia II called Bassiana, where he choice of Pannonia was advantageous for the Byzantines, because the Avars would threaten and be threatened by the Gepids. They themselves wanted the province of Scythia Minor. This would have put Thrace at risk".

⁹⁵ Καρδαράς 2010, 41; Obolensky 1971, 48; Κορδῶσης 2012, 139.

⁹⁶ Justinian also gave secret instruction to Justin to take the arms that they had purchased in Constantinople away from the envoys on their return. This act is said to have been the beginning of enmity between the Romans and the Avars, but the actual cause was that the envoys had not been quickly released. See Menander 1985, 52-53. Bury 1958, 315; Καρδαράς 2010, 42

⁹⁷ Menander, n. 90, 261: "Justin was crowned emperor on n November 14, 565; According to Corippus (*In Laud. iust.* 3, 151ff, the Avar envoys were given audience on the seventh day of his reign".

⁹⁸ The style of the speech, threatening and appealing is also common in Corippus. See Corippus, 3, 271-307ff, 69-70.

⁹⁹ Menander, fr.8, 94-97; Καρδαράς 2010, 41 Κορδῶσης 2012, 140 Obolensky 1971, 49.

¹⁰⁰ Menander fr.8, 94-97; Καρδαράς 2010, 46; Κορδῶσης 2012, 140.

¹⁰¹ The Lombards were receiving imperial subsidies by Justinian in order to fight the Gepids.

subjugated the Gepids and occupied the lands of the defeated in Dacia and Eastern Pannonia by 567¹⁰².

To sum up, the three Avar delegations aiming at requesting land for the tribe's settlement took place before the Avar migration to Pannonia. Although both emperors, Justinian and Justin II were quite flexible to provide the Avars with gifts and annual subsidies, they never consented to grant them land. Thus, the agreement between the embassy of Kermichíōnes and the Byzantine court had already been compiled since there was no reference to the Avar-Byzantine relations in the subsequent embassy of Maniakh (567/568), on the part of the Türks¹⁰³. So, the delegation of Kermichíōnes cannot be identified with the one headed by Maniakh whose objectives concerned the economic and political annihilation of Persia¹⁰⁴. Furthermore, Theophanes Byzantius specifies the arrival of the Türk envoys in terms of time before the Avar movement to Pannonia. Consequently, the Türk envoys must have been sent before 567¹⁰⁵.

In addition, when the Türk Khagan, Silzibul¹⁰⁶ heard of the flight of the Avars and the damages they caused by ravaging the territory of the Türks at their departure,

¹⁰² The Avars took advantage of the Lombard migration to Italy (568), and occupied the territory vacated by the latter. Therefore, they became the masters of the entire plain of present-day Hungary except for the area of Sirmium, which the Byzantines had already conquered under the leadership of the general Bonus. Having established a powerful empire in Central Europe, the Avars became a constant threat for the Byzantines as they launched attacks to the empire during three next three decades. See Browning 1979, 207; Golden 1990, 260; Fryer 2001, 179; Καρδαράς 2010, 47-48; Κορδώσης 2012, 140-141; Obolensky 1971, 49-50.

¹⁰³ Κορδώσης 2012, 141-142.

¹⁰⁴ Frye 2001, 179.

¹⁰⁵ Κορδώσης 2012, 140.

¹⁰⁶ For the name *Silzibul* see Moravcsik 1983, 275-276. The name of the Türk Khagan occurs in three forms as *Dizabul*, *Dilzibul* and *Silzibul* in the Byzantine historiography. From these scripts the last one is to be preferred since the great Muslim Chronicler, Tabari (died 923-924) names him as Sindjibu-Khagan, see Bury 1897, 418; Chavannes (1900, 227-228).claims that the name Silzibul derives from the proper name Sin and the Türk title yabghou Also, there are different accounts concerning the identification of Silzibul. While the Türk khagan is known as Ishtemi among his clan (see Σαββίδης 2006, 187) there are scholars who do not identify Ishtemi with Silzibul. Sinor (1990, 303) argues that there is no evidence to believe that Ishtemi and Silzibul are the same person apart from the fact that Ishtemi was in charge of the Western Frontier Region of the Türk Empire,. Frye (2001, 179) considers that while Ishtemi was one of the ruler of the Western Türks, Silzibul was another leader, who dealt with the Byzantines. In spite of Menander's words that there were four leaders among the Türks but the supreme authority over the whole state rested with Silzibul the latter cannot be identified with Muhan. According to Sinor (1990, 303) it is probable that Maniakh simply exaggerated and boasted of the power of his Khagan and consequently of the significance of his mission). See also Κορδώσης 2012, n. 5, 96.

he declared boastfully that since the Avars were not *birds or fish* to take refuge in the air or in the depths of the sea respectively but they had to travel the earth, he would crush them when he finished the war with the Ephthalites¹⁰⁷. It is likely that Silzibul became extremely irritated when he learnt that the Avars moved to lower Danube (561-562) and sent the delegation of Kermichíōnes to convince the emperor not give an asylum to his previous vassals¹⁰⁸. Thus, the embassy of 563 could be identified with the embassy that Theophanes Byzantius mentions¹⁰⁹ on condition that the latter might have been mistaken with regard to the date of its arrival, namely during Justin II's reign.

To conclude, it is likely that the Türks were informed that the Avars had already advanced at Lower Danube (561-562) and they were negotiating with the Byzantines. As a result of that, Silzibul sent the delegation of 563 in order to claim from the Byzantines not to respond to the Avar' request for ceding them land to settle. It is also probable that the embassy was dispatched by a certain Türk ruler under the instructions of Silzibul whose tribe inhabited the territory of the ancient Massagetae¹¹⁰. Consequently, since the Kermichíōnes were the Türks, according to Theophanes Byzantius, and were sent before 567, the embassy of Theophanes Confessor is identified with the embassy of Theophanes Byzantius despite the fact that there is a discrepancy concerning the date of the date of its arrival into the Byzantine court¹¹¹.

2.2. The 567 Türk embassy to Byzantium (According to Menander Protector)

Most of the information on the embassy of 567 is drawn from Menander Protector, who is the major source for the diplomatic and military history of the reigns of Justin II and Tiberius¹¹². The 567 Türk embassy¹¹³ to the Byzantines was a result of

¹⁰⁷ Menander, fr.4.2, 44-47, Macartney 1944, 267.

¹⁰⁸ Κορδώσης 2012, 141.

¹⁰⁹ Κορδώσης 2012, 143.

¹¹⁰ Κορδώσης 2012, 143.

¹¹¹ Κορδώσης 2012, 143.

¹¹² Baldwin 1978, 101.

¹¹³ Chavannes 1900, 235; Σαββίδης 1996, 61-62.

the disruption of the diplomatic contacts between the Türks and the Persians¹¹⁴ whose empires became adjacent, in Central Asia (mod. Afghanistan), after the destruction and the partition of the Hephthalite Empire¹¹⁵.

The Sogdians¹¹⁶, who had previously been subjects of the Hephthalites, at that particular time were under the Türk supremacy. Since they needed to find markets for their silk products, they had to obtain first their rulers' permission in order to sell silk in Persia. So, Silzibul consented to send an embassy to the Persians in order to negotiate their engagement in the silk trade with them. Although the delegation was travelling under the Türk auspices, it was in fact a Sogdian mission headed by Maniakh, who was their leader¹¹⁷. When the latter requested from king Khosro (531-579) to provide his permission for the Sogdian merchants to sell raw silk in Persian markets without any hindrance¹¹⁸, the Persian ruler, unwilling to grant them free access, put off his reply. Indeed, the Persian king found himself in a predicament as he was afraid not only of an imminent Türk expansion southwards, into Persian territories, but also of a possible loss of the benefits resulting from Sassanid monopoly over silk transit, since the Türks appeared to be claiming a share in silk trade profits¹¹⁹.

Finally, acting on Katulph's¹²⁰ advice, Khosro bought the large quantities of silk that the Sogdians brought with them in a fair price, burning them, though, right

¹¹⁴ The alliance between Silzibul, who ruled the western part of the Türk realm and the Sassanid ruler Khosro was concluded in 557 and sealed with the marriage of the king Khosro with the daughter of the Türk Khagan. See Kopδώσης 2012, 82. Although the Türks and Sassanids agreed to crush the Hephthalites and divide their land, this was a short-lived alliance for the two empires had conflict of interests as both of them were seeking to control the western end of the silk route. See Golden 1992, 128; Roux 1998, 71.

¹¹⁵ The cooperation between the Türks and the Sassanids resulted in the destruction and partition of the Hephthalite Kingdom that took place around 560. Therefore, Türks and Sassanids acquired common frontiers, which followed the Oxus River. See Menander 1985, 252; Sinor 1977, 430.

¹¹⁶ Vaissière 2005, 199: "The Sogdians were the main merchants of the Türk steppe. They played the role of counsellors to the nomads and had a strong foothold in the economic and political life of the successive Türk qaghanates which controlled the steppe from Mongolia between the middle of the 6th and the middle of the 8th centuries". See also Menander 1985, 110-111; Erdemir 2004, 426; Sinor 1977, 431.

¹¹⁷ Menander, fr.10.1, 114-115; Sinor 1990, 301.

¹¹⁸ Menander, fr.10.1, 1985, 112-13. "ἐδέοντο τῆς μετάξης πέρι, ὅπως ἄνευ τινὸς κωλύμης αὐτοῖς προέλθοι ἐπ' αὐτῇ τὰ τῆς ἐμπορίας".

¹¹⁹ Menander, n. 115, 262; Sinor 1977, 432.

¹²⁰ Katulph first appears in the fourth fragment of Menander's History as an advisor of the Hephthalite ruler. But due to the fact that he was treated unjustly, Katulph reappears as an advisor then of the Persian king Khosro, (Menander, fr.10.1, 112-113). Menander, probably because Katulph's life had caught his interest, provides us with some more information to justify the latter's desertion firstly to the Türks – for his wife had been raped by the Hephthalite ruler – and then to the Sassanids. According

afterwards without any hesitation in front of the envoys' eyes, making it clear that the Persians were determined to preserve silk transit and trade through the main land and sea routes under their control¹²¹. Despite the fact that the silk was burnt and the Sogdians returned empty-handed, the Türk khagan, Silzibul was not disappointed since he was persistent in restoring the relations between the Persian and his own empire. Thus, a second Türk delegation was dispatched to the Persians but it was utter failure in every aspect. King Khosro taking the advice of Katulph and his other consultants, rejected the offer of the Türks due "to the untrustworthy nature of the Scythians¹²²". It seems that either the Türks were not complying with the terms of the agreement in which the two empires concluded when they had decided to subjugate and divide the Hephthalite state or there was no reason for the agreement to be kept since it was unprofitable, at least for the Persians¹²³.

Taking this into account (and performing an act of utter hostility), king Khosro decided, then, to poison some of the Türk envoys¹²⁴ to prevent any future delegations from coming to Persia and, henceforth, to break off the Türk-Persian diplomatic relations¹²⁵. While the official Persian explanation for the death of the envoys was the dryness of the Persian weather, which proved 'fatal' to them, the Türk Khagan recognized that the envoys were actually killed by treachery¹²⁶. Due to the fact that the Persians violated the time-honored law of international diplomatic immunity, the relations between the Persians and the Türks became hostile¹²⁷. Having failed in the negotiations with the Sassanid Empire, the Türks turned to cultivate friendly relations with Byzantium influenced by their vassals the Sogdians.

to Felföldi (2001, 193-194) Katulph was a prominent person because he was not only aware of Hephthalite and Türk conditions, but he was also an expert in silk trade. Indeed, when he became an advisor of the Sassanid ruler he played a very significant role in Persian politics.

¹²¹ Menander, fr.10.1, 112-113.

¹²² Menander, fr.10.1, 112-113 and n. 116, 262; "The 'Scythians' is not used as a synonym for 'Türks' but refers in general to all the nomadic inhabitants of Scythia. The view that nomads were untrustworthy was shared with the Romans".

¹²³ Κορδώσης 2012, 97.

¹²⁴ Beckwith 2009, 116.

¹²⁵ Menander, fr.10.1, 112-113; Κορδώσης 2012, 96; Λαμπράκης- Πάγκαλος 1934, 143; Sinor, 1977, 432; Sinor 1990, 302.

¹²⁶ Menander, fr.10.1, 114-115.

¹²⁷ Beckwith 2009, 116; Menander, fr.10.1, 114-115; Κορδώσης 2012, 97.

Thus, Silzibul consented to Maniakh's proposal to dispatch a delegation to the Byzantines since *they made more use of it (silk) than other people*¹²⁸. Along with the embassy, which was led by Maniakh, the Türk khagan sent raw silk as present and a letter written in Scythian language *γράμμα τὸ Σκυθικόν*¹²⁹. Despite the fact that the envoys had traversed many lands, mountainous areas and rivers¹³⁰ the route was quite safe since the Türks had under their control the territory extending to the north of the Black Sea¹³¹. The delegation finally reached Byzantium through the land of the Alans.

After their splendid reception¹³² and the interpretation of the Scythian letter, the Emperor willingly gave an audience to the envoys. Justin II took advantage of their presence and asked information *about the leadership of the Türks and their location*¹³³. Maniakh, then, replied that the Türk realm consisted of four principalities but he attributed the supremacy over the whole realm to Silzibul¹³⁴. The envoys, also, mentioned the Hephthalites, whom the Türks subjugated and made their tributary. Justin, in turn required to learn whether the Türks had made all the power of the Hephthalites subject to them. When the ambassadors answered positively, the Emperor asked again if the Hephthalites lived in cities or villages¹³⁵. The envoys

¹²⁸ Menander fr.10.1, 114.

¹²⁹ Menander, fr.10.1, 114 and n. 119, 263. "... *Scythian* is used in a loose way of the languages of Central Asia...One of the languages of the settled peoples such as Sogdian is more likely". Vailhé (1909, 210) claims that the letter was written in alphabet paléo-turc". Cahun (1896, 212), also, argues that the *Scythian* characters of the letter belonged to an Old Turkic script and considers remarkable the fact that the Byzantines had an interpreter, who could translate the particular letter. However, the aforementioned views come in contrast with the Bugut inscription, dated to the last quarter of the sixth century, which is written in Sogdian script, despite the fact that the language is Turkic. See Άμαντος 1940, 63; Kljaštornyj- Livšic 1972, 82; Erdal 2004, 1-4; Κορδῶσης 2012, 99.

¹³⁰ Menander, fr.10.1, 114-115.

¹³¹ Talāt 1968, 263: "Over the human beings, my ancestors Bumin Kagan and Istāmi Kagan became rulers....Having marched with the armies they conquered all the peoples in the four quarters of the world and subjugates them. They made the proud enemies bow and powerful ones kneel".

¹³² Λαμπράκης- Πάγκαλος 1934, 147-152.

¹³³ Menander, fr.10.1, 114-115.

¹³⁴ Bury 1897, 419-420: There were at this time two distinct and independent Turkish realms: the northern realm of Silzibul, who lived in the northern Golden Mountain, and the southern realm of Muhan, who lived in the southern Golden Mountain. Silzibul was the senior khagan over the four principalities that comprised the western Türk realm. See also Chavannes 1900, 235; Cahun 1896, 112-113.

¹³⁵ According to Procopius *History of the Wars* I.3.2-5 the land of the Hephthalites lies immediately to the north of Persia. The Hephthalites are not nomads like the other Hunnic tribes, since they have been established in land. They are ruled by a king and possess lawful constitution. The Greek historian refers to one of their cities called Gorgo located over against the Persian frontier, which is an indication that the Hephthalites had sedentary civilization. Moreover, Theophanes Byzantius, (3, 270), mentions that the Hephthalites became masters of the cities and harbors, which were formerly owned by the Persians after the latter's defeat. However, according to Enoki (1959, 10) in the Chinese sources there

assured the Emperor that the Hephthalites used to live in cities, which all of them were conquered by the Türks¹³⁶.

Taking in to account the dialogue as described above, Justin II's questions concerned not only the Türk people but also their vassals. Actually, the Emperor insisted on learning about the fate of the Hephthalites because it seemed rather unconvincing the fact that the dominant for more than a century in Central Asia Hephthalite Empire had been subjugated in such a short period of time by the Türks¹³⁷. Furthermore, it is possible that Justin II was also exploring the Persian claim, which came in contrast with the aforementioned answers of the Türk envoys¹³⁸. More specifically, during the negotiations of 561 for peace the Persian envoy Zikh began to boast and exalt king Khosro by saying that his king was invincible and among the other victories he had also destroyed the power of the Hephthalites¹³⁹. As a result of that, it seems that the Byzantine Emperor wished to be informed about the recent developments in Central Asia as best as possible.

Besides the Hephthalites, Justin II showed interest in knowing about the Avars¹⁴⁰, who had coercively requested to become *foederati* (558) and caused troubles to the Byzantine Empire. Therefore, he inquired about the number of the Avars that had managed to flee from the Türk rule and whether there wereb any of them subject

are references on the nomadic character of the Hephthalites since they had neither cities and towns nor fixed residence of their king. On the contrary, they lived in tents and moved to cooler areas in summer and warm regions in winter in pursuit of water and pasture lands. Litvinsky (1996, 148) in order to explain these different accounts argues that the Hephthalites were originally nomadic or semi-nomadic but later, after conquering vast regions with towns and fortresses, they began to settle in towns.

¹³⁶ Menander, fr.10.1, 114-115.

¹³⁷ Κορδώσης 2012, 100-101.

¹³⁸ Menander, n.121, 263.

¹³⁹ Menander, fr. 6.1, 64-65.

¹⁴⁰ Szádeczky- Kardoss (1990, 206) claims that Priscus is the first to mention the name of the Avars when he referred to Eurasian migrations about 463 A.D. As it stated above, these people caused the Sabirs to leave from their dwellings and triggered successive migrations of oghuric nations, who settled to Caucasian and Pontic regions. However, it cannot be decided whether Menander refers to the real Avars that Priscus describes or to the so-called Pseudo-Avars, who showed up nearly one century later in the region of the Black Sea. Menander, later on, he uses the ethnonym Varchonitae to denote the Avars (ἐδήλουν δε τους Ἀθάρους), the Türks' slaves "who fled their masters, (Menander, fr.19.1, 174-175). According to Theophylactus Simocatta (VII.7.8, 259) the Pseudo-Avars had appropriated the Avar name in order to be considered awesome by people who came in contact with them. The same historian adds that their real name was Varchonitae, a compound word that denotes the origins of Pseudo-Avars, the people who originated from the fusion of two Oghuric tribes, the Var and the Chunni. As a result of that, the Avars of Menander may or may not be associated with the Varchonitae, who fled to the West. See also Καρδαράς 2010, 32-35; Κορδώσης, 2012, 103.

to the Türks¹⁴¹. The ambassadors replied that while there still were Avars under their dominion, twenty thousand warriors with their families had fled westwards, away from their supremacy¹⁴². After enumerating the tribes subject to the Türks¹⁴³, the delegation requested from the Emperor *εἰρήνην τε ξυνεστάναι καὶ ὁμαιχμίαν 'Ρωμαίοις τε καὶ Τούρκοις*¹⁴⁴. They also stated that they would willingly fight against the enemies of the Byzantine Empire. Indeed, in order to show their honest intentions, they sealed what they had said with great oaths¹⁴⁵.

Since Byzantines and Türks shared common interests, in Menander's words they *became friends*¹⁴⁶ and entered into an alliance with each other. The alliance was to be beneficial for both sides in economic and political terms. Indeed, the Sogdians identified that the Byzantine empire was the principal western center of silk consumption to which the Türks jointly with them could sell the Chinese surplus of silk and make huge profits¹⁴⁷. Also, apart from having access to the largest market, the Türks were able to circumvent the Sassanids by transferring their products through the northern Silk Road¹⁴⁸ which was under their control after their expansion.

On the part of the Byzantines, the Türk proposal was a unique opportunity to break the Persian monopoly of silk trade since the latter levied great taxes on the goods and regulated the prices and the quantities of the valuable material that were imported to Byzantium¹⁴⁹. So, despite the fact that Justin II, probably anxious to secure most advantageous terms, showed to the Türk embassy the silk worm breeding, he was willing to conclude a Byzantine-Türk alliance seeing that silk production was at its first steps¹⁵⁰.

¹⁴¹ Menander, fr.10.1, 114-117.

¹⁴² Menander, fr.10.1, 116-117; Szádeczky-Kardoss 1990, 207.

¹⁴³ Theophylactus Simocatta in his history (VII .7.8, 258) mentions peoples subject to Türks such as the *Μουκρί/ΒύκλιBücli* to which the Avars fled or the *Ἀδελφοί*, whom he identifies with the Hephthalites.

¹⁴⁴ Menander, fr.10.1, 116-117.

¹⁴⁵ Menander, fr.10.1, 116-117.

¹⁴⁶ Menander, fr.10.1, 116-117.

¹⁴⁷ Beckwith 2009, 116; Menander, fr.10.1, 114-115; Λαμπράκης-Πάγκαλος 1934, 143; Sinor, 1977, 432; Sinor 1990, 302; Vaissière 2005, 234-235.

¹⁴⁸ For the northern Silk Route See Zhang Xu-Shan 1998b, 126-131.

¹⁴⁹ Bosworth 2006, xxvii; Κορδῶσης 299, 170

¹⁵⁰ Sinor 1969, 105.

The alliance was not confined only to economic issues. It was also an *offensive and defensive alliance*¹⁵¹ against the mutual enemies of both empires. The two allies aimed at placing Persia in the crossfire. On the one hand the Türks intended to exert their authority over the Persian lands in order to take under their control parts of the central Silk Road and exploit the already existing transport facilities instead of establishing new ones along the deserts of the northern Silk route. On the other the Byzantines taking advantage of the Türk enmity acquired a new, faithful ally in their protracted wars against the Persians. The recruit of potential allies was necessary for the Byzantines in order to preserve the Empire's boundaries¹⁵². Since the Byzantines had not inexhaustible sources to allocate along the borders, the proposed alliance with the Türks would secure the eastern frontiers from imminent Persian invasions and provide Justin with the opportunity to protect better the empire's western frontiers at the particular moment¹⁵³. As a result of that Maniakh's mission marked the official beginning of the Byzantine-Türk diplomatic exchanges that were carried on by the dispatch of the Byzantine delegation led by Zemarchus¹⁵⁴.

2.3. The 568 Byzantine Embassy to the Türks (According to Menander Protector)

Justin II, thinking of the promising prospects of a Byzantine -Türk alliance due to political and economic reasons, concluded to send a delegation to the Türks. Therefore, he ordered Zemarchus¹⁵⁵ the Cilician, who was at that time the *magister militum per Orientem*¹⁵⁶, to accompany Maniakh on his way back. According to

¹⁵¹ Byzantium's struggle to preserve its boundaries was the primary objective of Byzantine Diplomacy which Obolensky named as *defensive imperialism*.

¹⁵² Byzantium's struggle to preserve its boundaries was the primary objective of Byzantine Diplomacy which Obolensky named as *defensive imperialism*.

¹⁵³ Erdemir 2004, 429.

¹⁵⁴ Kordoses 2011, 297.

¹⁵⁵ The data on Zemarchus personality and life are fragmentary. According to Dobrovits (2011, 384) he was a Senator and he might be identical with Zemarchus, who held the title Perfect of Rome, namely Constantinople before 560. At the end of 560 he suppressed the revolt in Antioch as comes Orientis, see Feissel 1986, 126. He was recalled to Constantinople and by the year 562 he served as curator at Πλακιδία, the palace that was erected by the daughter of Theodosius I, see Cameron-Cameron (1996, 9). Greatrex claims (1997, 71) that in 565 he was removed from the prefecture of Constantinople and sent back to East.

¹⁵⁶ Menander, fr.10.2, 116: "ὅς τῶν πρὸς ἔω πόλεων τηνικαῦτα ὑπῆρχε στρατηγός."

Menander, they set out on their journey in August 568¹⁵⁷, (namely in less than a year from the arrival of the Türk embassy) and returned the following year, while John of Ephesus mistakenly dates the envoys' departure to the seventh year of Justin II's reign. The Journey was completed after *πολλῶν ἡμερῶν ὁδόν*¹⁵⁸, when they arrived at the territories of the Sogdians. The Türk and the Byzantine envoys did not follow the easier route via Crimea and the Pontic- Caspian steppes. In fact, this particular route had not been used until 576, when the embassy of Valentinus took this way via Sinope and Cherson¹⁵⁹. So, they used the same itinerary that Maniakh and his companions took in order to come to the lands of the Byzantines¹⁶⁰.

After dismounting from their horses the Byzantine embassy were met by certain Türks, who were sent deliberately to offer some iron for sale. The purpose of this awkward act was to demonstrate that their land produced more iron than they needed¹⁶¹. This particular scene shows that there was an organized propaganda on the part of the Türk nomadic empire, that aimed at deceiving the ambassadors of a foreign state. In that era the deceit of the enemy was a common technique used as regards access routes to imperial lands¹⁶². Zemarchus for instance, when he returns back home, tries to mislead some Persians by sending them from other routes. In addition, Turxanthus accuses the Byzantines of hiding deliberately from the Türks the more comfortable way to their country, via Crimea and the western shores of the Black Sea.

Before being presented to Silzibul, Zemarchus and his retinue had gone through a certain Shamanistic ritual of purification by fire¹⁶³. Therefore, some other people from the same tribe appeared to the Byzantine delegation announcing

¹⁵⁷Chavannes 1900, 237; Menander 1985, 116-117.

¹⁵⁸ Menander, fr.10.3, 116-117; cf. John of Ephesus (VI.23, 425) states that the Journey lasted for one year.

¹⁵⁹ Menander, fr.19.1, 170-173.

¹⁶⁰ Dobrovits (2011, 385) claims that the ambassadors did not use the way through the Crimea and Pontic steppes because it was unsafe due to the Avars. In fact, the Pontic steppes came into Türks' hands between 576 and 579. Moreover, at that particular era the Sabirs were still allies of the Persians against the Türks.

¹⁶¹ Menander, fr.10.3, 116-119. The Türk became blacksmiths when they were under the yoke of the Róurán. See Sinor 1969, 101; Chavannes 1900, 235.

¹⁶² Κορδῶσης 2012, 105.

¹⁶³ Dawson (2005, 12) claims that exorcism was a common practice among the tribes of Central Asia. According to Plano Caripini's narration Michael, Duke of Chernikov, when he visited the Tartar khan Batu in 1246, he passed between two fires.

themselves as exorcists of the evil omens. Menander describes quite vividly the ritual of purification during which the evil averters used fire, made noise with bells and drums, chanted in *Scythian* tongue and raged about like maniacs in order to repel the evil spirits. After chasing the evil beings, they made Zemarchus pass through the fire¹⁶⁴. After these performances the envoys were driven to Silzibul.

The meeting between the Türk khagan and Zemarchus took place on a mountain called *Ektag*¹⁶⁵, or *Golden Mountain* in Greek¹⁶⁶. However, when Menander refers to the Valentinus' embassy (576) calls the same mountain Ektel, which also means *Golden*¹⁶⁷. Moreover, Theophylactus Simocatta gives additional information concerning the location and the appellation of the mountain. It is 400 miles far away from the mountain *Ἰκάρι* and it is named *Golden* (*Χρυσσοῦν*) due the abundance of the fruit produced and the animals that were fed on it. He also states that the Golden Mountain is granted to the most prevalent Khagan¹⁶⁸. The location of the mountain Ektag has raised much discussion. In any case it is a region of Central Asia situated either in Chinese Turkestan or in Kazakhstan¹⁶⁹.

Silzibul received the Byzantine delegation in the way of traditional nomadic ruler. He was in a tent, seated on a golden throne with two wheels, which could be drawn by one horse, when deemed necessary¹⁷⁰. After greeting the Türk Khagan the envoys laid presents before him. Zemarchus addressed Silzibul as the *ruler of so many people*, while he introduced his own master as an *emperor*¹⁷¹. Then, the Byzantine embassy wished the Türk Khagan, who was considered friend by the Romans, felicitous and kind luck and a victorious glorious reign. In addition, Zemarchus confirmed the Byzantine-Türk friendship by stating that the Byzantines would be friends not only

¹⁶⁴ Menander, fr.10.3, 118-119.

¹⁶⁵ For Ektag/Ektel see Moravcsik 1958, 122.

¹⁶⁶ Menander, fr.10.3, 118-119: "ἵνα ὁ Χαγάνος αὐτὸς ᾗν, ἐν ὄρει τινὶ λεγομένῳ Ἐκτάγ, ὡς ἂν εἴποι χρυσσοῦν ὄρος" *Ἕλληνας ἀνὴρ*."

¹⁶⁷ Menander, fr.19.1, 178-179.

¹⁶⁸ Theophylactus Simocatta, VII. 8. 11-13, 260.

¹⁶⁹ Klaproth (1826, 117) and Bury (1897, 418) claim that Silzibul's seat was somewhere in the Altai ranges, whose name meant *Golden* while Chavannes (1900, 235-237) identifies the mountain Ektag with mount A-kie-tien (White mountain in Chinese), which is to the south of Koutcha by the river Tekes. For the location of the mountain see Cahun 1896, 4; Menander, n. 129, 269; Grousset 1970, 128; Κορδῶσης 2012, 107; Dobrovits 2011, 387.

¹⁷⁰ Menander, fr.10.3, 118-119.

¹⁷¹ Menander, fr.10.3, 118-119.

towards the Türks but also towards their subjects. After Zemarchus' polite speech, Silzibul replied in like manner¹⁷². Taking into account Menander's words, referring to the last Byzantine ambassador to the Turks, Valentine, when he asked the Türk ruler Turxantus to reconfirm the friendship and the earlier treaty between the Romans and the Turks, which Silzibul and the emperor Justin II had made when Zemarchus first came there¹⁷³, one may realize the importance of Zemarchus' visit during which the foundation of the Byzantine-Türk alliance were established¹⁷⁴. Then, they were called to feast and passed the whole day enjoying themselves.

Silzibul granted two other audiences to the Byzantine delegation in different dwellings. Menander uses different expressions to denote the Türk lodgings, i.e. *σκηνῆς, καλύβη, διαίτη*¹⁷⁵, which indicated the nomadic way of living that was characterized by mobile dwelling. Despite the lack of permanent residence, the tents were lavishly furnished with silk, gold and silver. There were silken hangings, golden urns, pitchers, silver utensils and other precious objects, which were not only pieces of art but they could also be converted into money¹⁷⁶. Moreover, there were statues which were typical in Buddhism¹⁷⁷. The Chinese influence was evident in the sweet wine that the dinner guests were offered to drink, probably made of rice¹⁷⁸.

While the Byzantine delegation was enjoying the Türk hospitality, Silzibul decided that Zemarchus with twenty people of his retinue should accompany the Khagan *as he was marching against the Persians*¹⁷⁹. The particular campaign may be identified with the military expedition that was launched against the Sassanids (569–570) in which the Türks conquered the territory of the former Hephthalite kingdom belonging to Persia¹⁸⁰. The rest of the Romans were sent back to the land of

¹⁷² Menander, fr.10.3, 118-119.

¹⁷³ Menander, fr.19.1, 172-173.

¹⁷⁴ Kordoses 2011, 297.

¹⁷⁵ Menander 1985, 120.

¹⁷⁶ Chavannes 1900, 238.

¹⁷⁷ Dobrovits 2011, 389. "Such statues are usually unknown in Shamanism but are very typical in Buddhism. Buddhism, later rejected by the second Turkic Empire was at the highest point of its influence at that time amongst the Eastern Turks".

¹⁷⁸ Menander, n. 131 264; Dobrovits 2011, 389.

¹⁷⁹ Menander, fr.10.3, 120-121.

¹⁸⁰ Dickens 2004, 55; Harmatta –Litvinsky 1996, 360; Kordoses 2011, 297-298; Κορδώσης 2012, 115.

Kholiatae¹⁸¹ to await the return of Zemarchus. Before they moved on, Silzibul honored the Byzantine ambassadors with gifts and Zemarchus was given as a present, a handmaiden and a war- captive from the people called Kherkhir¹⁸². Then, the Byzantine delegation followed the Türk khagan to Talas, which might have been his winter residence.

When they encamped in Talas¹⁸³, Silzibul received another delegation dispatched by the Persian king, whom he invited together with the Byzantines to dine with him. During the dinner Silzibul treated the Byzantines with greater esteem than the Persians since they had been seated in a more distinguished place at the table. Moreover, the Persian envoys had to endure the Türk khagan's reproaches, who emphasized on the injuries he had received at their hands and told them that on this account he was going to attack them. Finally, while the accusations were heaped, the Persian envoys argued back refuting Silzibul's charges and using intemperate expressions regardless of the etiquette that imposes silence at the feasts. Under these circumstances the negotiations came into an end and the Türk khagan prepared for a war against the Persians¹⁸⁴.

¹⁸¹ Menander has three spellings of the name *Kholiatai*, (see also Moravcsik 1958, 345), all of them in plural and in genitive case: *Χολιατῶν* (10, 3) *Χοαλιτῶν* (10, 3), and *Χλιατῶν* (10, 4), see (Menander, fr.10.3, 120-124). In terms of form, *Kholiatai* must be a Hellenized ethnonym, see Dobrovits 2011, 391. According to Menander (, fr.10.3, 122-124), *Kholiatai* lived in a city that had fortresses. Their city was located near an enormous lake and the river Oekh which was not in a long distance from the lake. Alemany (2000, 183) identifies these two places with the lake Aral and the river Jaxartes/Syr Darya respectively. "Κορδῶσης (2012, 111) argues that the land of *Kholiatai* may be situated to the "west of Talas but not so close to the river Oech since the Byzantine delegation met with other tribes before their arriving at the Oech river". Also, the *Kholiatai* must have been distinguished vassals since they were the only tribe that Silzibul consented to accompany the Byzantine embassy during their return to the Byzantine empire, see Menander, fr.10.3, 124). Many scholars identify the *Kholiatai* with the Khorazm (Vaissière 2005, 255; Dobrovits 2011, 391), because Khorezm was a sedentary civilization with a city and fortresses. For the identification of *Kholiatai* see also Litvinsky 1996, 184; Vailhé 1909, 211, Menander, n. 135 and 140, 264-266.

¹⁸² For "The name of the Kirghiz" see Pulleyblank 1990, 98-108; Moravcsik (1958, 344) tried to emend this form and read Kherkhis. Klaproth (1826, 117) had read this ethnonym as Kherkhiz or Khirkiz. According to scholars (Dobrovits 2011, 396) these people were identified with the *Yenisey Khirghiz* who lived far north of the Old Türks.

¹⁸³ This place, which has the same name with the river Talas, is located between the rivers Chu and Jaxartes and is well known from Chinese and Arabic writers (Chavannes 1900, 238).

¹⁸⁴ Menander, fr.10.3, 122-123.

John of Ephesus recounts another incident. According to his account¹⁸⁵, Silzibul dismissed the Persian envoys in anger threatening to kill them for they tried to deceive him. The Persian delegation claimed that the king of the Romans were their slave and he paid a yearly tribute as a slave¹⁸⁶. Zemarchus not only refuted the Persian allegation but also he evoked the memory of Trajan, who occupied Mesopotamia and erected his statue in their land.

After the departure of the Persian ambassadors Silzibul reaffirmed his declarations of friendship for the Byzantines in front of Zemarchus and his party, whom he sent them back to their home accompanied by another Türk embassy. Since Maniakhs died in the meantime, the Byzantine delegation was escorted by a new ambassador who was named Taghma and held the title of Tarkhan¹⁸⁷. It is possible that the purpose of the particular embassy was to urge the Byzantines to launch a joint attack on the Persians since in the following years (572) Justin II encouraged by the Türk marched out against their common enemy¹⁸⁸. The son of Maniakhs was also a member of the Türk delegation and despite his young age he ranked immediately after the leader of the embassy because his father had been loyal to Silzibul¹⁸⁹. Nevertheless, it is possible that the title of the ambassador was bequeathed to the young man by his father taking to account that Maniakhs *τῶν Σογδαϊτῶν προειστήκει*¹⁹⁰. This would be beneficiary for both ethnicities, since the Sogdians could ensure the continuity of their ruling class and the Türks served their interests without having to change the social structure of their vassals¹⁹¹.

Zemarchus and his companions went to the land of Kholiatas to join up with the rest of the delegation that was dispatched there earlier and had been told to await their leader's return. Thenceforth, they began their journey home leaving the capital of Kholiatas and travelling through fortresses. As the rumor spread among the

¹⁸⁵ John of Ephesus, VI.23, 426-428.

¹⁸⁶ John of Ephesus, VI.23, 426.

¹⁸⁷ Moravcsik 1958, 299 claims that the term was a Bulgaro-turkic word used by the Türks of envoys or counsellors; Cahun (1896, 58) argues that the term *Tarkhan* derives from the root *tara* and *Khan* which means "seigneur de labours". See also Kopδώσης 2012, 110: "Since Taramak or tarimak means to cultivate land, Tarkhan were the lords of sedentary agricultural societies who were vassals of the Türks".

¹⁸⁸ Kopδώσης 2012, 115

¹⁸⁹ Menander, fr.10.3, 122- 123; Sinor 1990, 303-304.

¹⁹⁰ Menander, fr.10.1, 114.

¹⁹¹ Kopδώσης 2012, 110.

neighboring tribes that the Byzantine envoys, accompanied by a Türk delegation, were returning to their home, the local leaders requested Silzibul's consent to be allowed to send some of their people *ἐπὶ θέαν τῆς Ρωμαϊκῆς πολιτείας*¹⁹². Silzibul granted the permission only to the ruler of Kholiatai, whom the Byzantines received him across the river Oech and after a long journey they all came to a huge lake, in which they rested for three days. From there Zemarchus sent off a certain George with a letter informing the Emperor about their return from the Türks¹⁹³. George escorted by twelve Türks took a waterless, desert but shortest route that probably concluded to the Caspian Sea and then they travelled by ship¹⁹⁴.

John of Ephesus makes no reference to the journey back of Zemarchus delegation except that the envoys returned after an *absence of two years*¹⁹⁵. Menander, however, gives a more detailed account of it but the reconstruction of the route that Zemarchus took from Talas cannot be made with certainty. This is due to the fact that the physical geography of Central Asia has changed drastically since antiquity and neither the river Oekh nor the huge lagoon can be identified without any doubts¹⁹⁶. The major issue for the reconstruction¹⁹⁷ of the return journey of Byzantine delegation is the identification of the River Oech with the river Jaxartes¹⁹⁸ or the river Oxus¹⁹⁹. Nevertheless, Zemarchus might have travelled along the river Oxus until he arrived at the Sea of Aral. After a twelve day journey at the shady shores of the lake Aral and having crossed some difficult terrains, he passed the rivers Emba (Ich), Ural

¹⁹² Menander, fr.10.4, 124. Κορδῶσης 2012, 111 :The fact that different tribes asked Silzibul's permission to be allowed to visit the Byzantine Empire means that not only the Türks had subjugated these tribes but also they had consolidated and extended their power to west of the Caspian Sea making the contacts between them and Byzantines easier. Moreover, since the Türks had under their control the routes led to Byzantium, their vassals could promote their products to Byzantine Empire as their overlords ensured the safety of the routes.

¹⁹³ According to Dobrovits (2011, 393) they probably carried out a kind of military intelligence on the lands they travelled.

¹⁹⁴ Blockley believes (Menander, n. 141, 266) that George did not took a vastly different route while Dobrovits (2011, 396) argues that George followed the same route with Zemarchus at least until he passed the Volga River.

¹⁹⁵ John of Ephesus, VI.23, 428.

¹⁹⁶ Menander, n. 140, 265-266. Blockley believes that the river Oekh could identified not only with Jaxartes or Oxus that the majority of the scholars propose but with any river west of Talas whether now existing or not. Moreover, he argues that the *enormous wide lake* was not Aral but the Caspian Sea at which Zemarchus arrived after a twelve days' journey away from the river Emba.

¹⁹⁷ For the reconstruction of Zemarchus' travel see Κορδῶσης 1996, 117-118; Alemany 2000, 183; Zhang Xu-Shan 1998b, 127.

¹⁹⁸ Alemany 2000, 183.

¹⁹⁹ Κορδῶσης, 1996, 117-118.

(Daich) and Volga (Attila) he came to the land of the Ugurs, which was under Silzibil's sovereignty²⁰⁰. The Ugurs revealed to the Byzantine delegation that by the river Kophen²⁰¹ four thousand Persians were stationed in ambush to take them prisoners as they passed²⁰². Therefore, helped by the Ugurs, the envoys were supplied with water in order to cross the desert. Afterwards, having passed a lagoon with *great body of water*, they arrived at lakes into which the river Kophen empties²⁰³. For fear of being attacked by the Persians and the tribe of Oromuschi²⁰⁴ the envoys proceeded with great caution until they reached the land of Alans.

The ruler of the Alans, Sarosius²⁰⁵ gladly received Zemarchus and his retinue but he refused to admit the Türk envoys unless they disarmed²⁰⁶. Finally, the Türks laid down their weapons with Zemarchus' mediation after a three day of dispute. Sarosius advised Zemarchus to avoid the road through the land of Miusiamians since the Persians had set up an ambush and awaited them. In order to deceive the Persians Zemarchus sent ten porters carrying silk on the expected route to make it seem that he was coming next, while he made a detour by the road called Dareine. Afterwards, the delegation arrived at the Black Sea, where they took the ship to the river Phasis and then to Trapezus, whence they rode post to Byzantium. When the envoys reach the Byzantine capital, they were granted audience by the Emperor and told him everything²⁰⁷.

Zemarchus delegation had successfully accomplished its objectives in terms of diplomatic and economic relations. First of all the Byzantine- Türk friendship was officially established. From that point both states were allied against their common

²⁰⁰ Menander, n. 146, 266: "By the date of Zemarchus' arrival there (mid 571) Turkish power had passed the Volga".

²⁰¹ Menander, n. 145, 266; "Kopen is the ancient name of the river Kabul in Afghanistan. ... Here it is identified with the Kuma." See also Dobrovits 2011, 395.

²⁰² Menander, fr.10.4, 124-125.

²⁰³ Dobrovits 2011, 395: "...lake mentioned here is merely the small bay of the Caspian Sea into which the Kuma really empties".

²⁰⁴ The Oromuschi are identified with Moskhoi who according to Procopius (*History of Wars* VIII.2. 24-26) lived between Lazica and Iberia. In Menander they appear to be north of the land of Alans. See Menander, n. 147, 266;

²⁰⁵ John of Epiphania (I.2, 274) claims that the Persians tried to bribe the ruler of the Alans to kill Zemarchus and his retinue, but the Alans mentioned this to the Byzantines.

²⁰⁶ Κορδῶσης (2012, 113) claims that the Alans were suspicious towards the Türks due to their increasing power. They probably believed that sooner or later the Türks would attack them.

²⁰⁷ Menander, fr.10.5, 126-127.

enemies, the Avars but most of all the Persians. The Byzantines found not only a strong ally operating in the rear of the Persians with his own forces but also a new supplier for the raw silk without the Persian mediation. Indeed, the Byzantine delegation returned to Constantinople laden with silk²⁰⁸. The importance of Zemarchus' mission is depicted by the fact that the Persians tried set up an ambush for the Byzantine delegation, on its way to Constantinople. Moreover, to balance the new situation the Persians attempted to bribe the Alans and the Sabirs in order to be on their side and undertook an expedition in Arabia Felix aiming at cutting off the Byzantines from the sea silk route²⁰⁹.

2.4. Embassies between Byzantines and Türks until 576

(According to Menander Protector)

Justin II seems that he had realized the importance of having a stable ally operating in the rear of the Persian empire. Therefore, he tried to consolidate the Byzantine- Türk alliance by frequent diplomatic contacts between the two nations. According to Menander five embassies were exchanged between 568 and 576. Beyond the names of their leaders little information is provided concerning these delegations, since the historian focuses on the Valentinus' mission. Actually, a brief reference is made to them on the occasion of the 106 Türk envoys who accompanied the embassy of 576 and had been left behind in Constantinople by previous Türk delegations. So, Menander writes:

At that time Türks, who had been sent by their various tribes on various occasions, had been in Byzantium for a long while. Some Anankhast, when he had come to Byzantium on an embassy, had brought three with him; some had come to the capital with Eutychius; others staying there had arrived with Valentinus himself on an earlier occasion (for he went twice as envoy to the Türks); and still others had come with Herodian and with Paul the Cician...²¹⁰ .

²⁰⁸ Menander, fr.10.5, 126-127.

²⁰⁹ Κορδώνης 2012, 113.

²¹⁰ Menander, 19.1, 170.

The names of the leaders of the Byzantine embassies to the Türks were Eutychius, Valentinus (he was the same person that headed the delegation of 576), Herodian and Paul the Cicilian. Anankhast²¹¹ is believed not to be a Roman representative due to the similarity of his name with the leader of the Utigurs, Anagai²¹², who appears in Menander's text below. Moreover, due to the fact that in the original text is written *, when he had come to Byzantium on an embassy*, this probably means that Anankhast was a Türk envoy, who arrived at the Byzantine capital under the command of his khagan.

In addition, it appears that when an embassy was sent from the Byzantines to the Türks and vice versa, it was accompanied by the previous delegation returning home²¹³. Therefore, the first Türk delegation led by Maniakh returned home escorted by Zemarchus' embassy to the Türks. Zemarchus in turn was accompanied by Taghma and his retinue upon his return to Constantinople. The 106 Türks who had been left behind by previous delegations went with Valentinus' embassy (576). Nevertheless, the Türk ambassadors, who came at Constantinople under the leadership of Taghma probably were not included among the 106 Türks²¹⁴ since there is no reference to this particular name among the other names of the ambassadors who brought with them Türks at the byzantine capital. Thus, it can be concluded that either these ambassadors had left with Taghma, which is not possible due to the fact that the alliance between the two nations had just been established and the Byzantines would have been willing to provide them with splendid reception and accommodation or Menander had omitted from his text some of the Türk envoys²¹⁵.

Also, it is noteworthy that between the years 569 (the return of Zemarchus) and 576, the exchange of delegations was so frequent that it shows the eagerness of the Byzantine court to maintain the Byzantine- Türk alliance. Taking into account that Zemarchus' mission lasted two years²¹⁶ the rest of the embassies probably needed less time, since Zemarchus was delayed due to his participation in Silzibul's campaign

²¹¹ Moravcsik 1958, 69.

²¹² Menander, 19.1, 172-173 and 178-179.

²¹³ Κορδῶσης 2012, 118, Sinor 1977, 43 and 1969, 107.

²¹⁴ Κορδῶσης 2012, 118.

²¹⁵ Κορδῶσης 2012, 118-119.

²¹⁶ John of Ephesus 1860, 428.

against the Persians and his stay at the land of Kholiatae. Therefore, the time period that included the arrival of a Byzantine embassy at the mount Ektag, its stay and return must not have exceeded half a year. This estimation is based on the fact that each delegation probably used the experience of the previous one and the envoys' journey was facilitated by the fact that the Türks had expanded westwards and had under their control most of the territories which the delegations had to traverse. Consequently, it is possible that during the seven years intervening between the embassies of Zemarchus and Valentinus four or five delegations may have been sent to the see of the khanate of the Western Türks.

To sum up, Justin II seized the opportunity to establish a Byzantine- Türk alliance due to commercial and political reasons, as it will be explained in the chapters to follow. As it has been aforementioned, the Byzantines aimed at a second supply route, bypassing the Persian lands, in order to avoid taxes and duties levied on goods, especially on the raw silk by the Sassanid emperors. Therefore, they preferred the trade route running to the north of the Aral and the Caspian Sea that came through the lands controlled by the Western Türks. Apart from that, the new allies were willing to confine the Persian menace in the Middle East front of the Byzantines so that the latter would be in the position to resist more effectively the permanent attacks of the barbarians on its northern frontiers. Also, it seemed possible that if the Byzantines together with the Türks waged a struggle on two fronts against the Persians, then they might succeed in destroying their common enemy²¹⁷, a plan which, as we will see, was realized during Heraclius' reign. As a result of that, the diplomatic contacts between the two countries were so frequent that the embassies travel jointly, a new one escorting the one returning to its homeland.

²¹⁷ Κορδώνης 2012, 120.

2.5. The 576 Byzantine embassy to the Türks and the brief breach of the Byzantino- Türk alliance

(According to Menander Protector)

The last Byzantine embassy to the Türks, headed by Valentinus²¹⁸, was sent in 576, namely the second year of Tiberius' reign²¹⁹. Tiberius was appointed as Caesar²²⁰ in 574²²¹ when Justin II became incapable of discharging his duties as the emperor of the Byzantine Empire due to mental illness²²². Therefore, Valentinus was assigned to announce, amongst others, the accession of Tiberius to the Türk Khagan and cement the existing alliance²²³.

As it was aforementioned, apart from his attendants Valentinus was accompanied by 106 Türks who had probably accumulated gradually and resided in Constantinople²²⁴. Instead of taking the route through Caucasus, the envoys took the northern route via Crimea²²⁵. First, they travelled by ship from Sinope to Cherson. Then, after crossing through Apatura, Phouloi, a Scythian province ruled by a woman called Akkagas, subject to Anagai²²⁶ and generally speaking areas covered with water and rough terrain²²⁷, they finally arrived at *πολεμικά σύμβολα*²²⁸ of Turxanthus²²⁹.

²¹⁸ Menander, n. 216, 275. "He was probably a spatharius"

²¹⁹ Menander, n.235, 277.

²²⁰ For Tiberius' accession to the throne and coronation see also Gibbon 1776, XLV, part II.

²²¹ According to Κορδῶσης (2012, 121) the previous delegation led by Paul the Cilician must have taken place little before Tiberius' elevation to the rank of the emperor.

²²² Browning 1978, 211; Treadgold 1997, 222-223.

²²³ Menander, 19.1, 172-173; Golden, 1992, 130; Parker, 1896, 443; Sinor 1990, 304; Vailhé 1909, 213.

²²⁴ Menander, 19.1, 1985, 170-171.

²²⁵ Κορδῶσης 2002, 166.

²²⁶ According to Alemany (2000, 187).Anagai was the chief of the Utigurs who were located near the Sea of Azov.

²²⁷ For a possible reconstruction of the journey see also Menander, n. 219, 275. Cahun, 1896, 115; Κορδῶσης 2012, 121.

²²⁸ Cahun, (1896, 115) considers that Menander's *πολεμικά σύμβολα* is an equivalent of the Türk and Mongol *ordou* that signified a *quartier general* that combined a royal and military camp.

²²⁹ Moravcsik 1958, 328; Menander 1985, n. 221, 276: "Turxanthus was apparently not a name but a rank (Türk-sad) below the Khagan". Cf. Cahun 1896,115 believes that this name was disfigured, probably by the genitive form given to a Greek transcription "Τούρξας-Τούρξαντος" which refers to the "nom turc archaïque d'homme et de peuple Turkèch". See also Sinor 1990, 304: "It can, however, be taken for granted that he was not the head - not even a primus inter pares - of the Western Turks... This appears clearly also from the fact that – his hostility towards the Romans notwithstanding - Turxath had their group proceed to the interior of the Turk territories to meet Tardu, without any doubt his superior".

Turxanthus was Silzibul's son, who had recently died²³⁰. In reality, when the envoys arrived, Turxanthus was preparing to perform the obsequies. Despite the fact that he was the Khagan's son he did not succeed his father to the supreme position of the khanate²³¹. However, taking in to account his words²³², it seems that he was acting on behalf of all the Türks, both of the western wing of the Khanate - under the command of Tardu²³³ - and of the eastern wing. Nevertheless, the possibility of acting on his own due to the long distances from the headquarters and his impulsive character should not be excluded²³⁴.

According to Menander, Turxanthus administered one of the eight sections into to which the land of Türks was divided²³⁵. However, recollecting Maniakh's statement that the Türk realm was divided into four principalities²³⁶ it becomes obvious that these statements are conflicting. It is also worth noting that John of Ephesus refers to the eight Türk *chiefs who dwell further inland* without including the one who began to lament when he saw the Byzantine envoys²³⁷. Moreover, Theophylactus Simocatta on this subject claims that the Türk tribes were divided into two parts²³⁸ which according to Kordoses²³⁹ means that the historian refers to the two district areas into which from 582 the Türk territory was divided, without mentioning lower in rank khagans.

Bury²⁴⁰, in his effort to explain the quadruple of 568 and the octuple of 567 division of the Türk territory states that there were two independent realms. The one was located on the northern Golden Mountain and the other on the southern Golden Mountain. These Türk realms were organized on the same principle: both of them were divided into four sections and were governed by a supreme khagan. So, in 568

²³⁰ On Silzibul's death, see Cahun 1896, 114.

²³¹ Bury 1897, 420.

²³² Menander 1985, 174: "έμοι γάρ υποκέκλιται πᾶσα ἡ γῆ ἀρχόμενη μὲν ἐκ τῶν τοῦ ἡλίου πρώτων ἀκτίνων, καταλήγουσα δὲ ἐς τὰ πέρατα τῆς ἐσπέρας".

²³³ Tardu is identified with the khagan Tat'eu of the Chinese sources. See Bury 1897, 421; Chavannes, 1900, 241; Parker 1896, 444.

²³⁴ Κορδῶσης 2012, 128-129.

²³⁵ Menander, 19.1, 172: "έν ὁκτώ γάρ μοίρας διεδάσαντο τὰ ἐκείνη ἅπαντα, εἷς γε τοῦ φύλλου τῶν Τούρκων ἔλαχε προεστάναι"

²³⁶ Menander, 10.1, 114-115.

²³⁷ John of Ephesus, VI.23, 425.

²³⁸ Theophylactus Simocatta, 260: "δυοῖ δὲ μεγίστοις τισὶ τὰ Τούρκων ἔθνη μεγαλαυχεῖ"

²³⁹ Κορδῶσης 2012, 123.

²⁴⁰ Bury 1897, 420-421.

the Byzantines knew only about the four districts of Silzibul's northern realm. However in 576 the Byzantines were informed as well on the southern realm as they travelled into further Türk territory.

Afterwards, Menander mentions the name of *Arsilas*, who was the eldest or the supreme ruler of all the Türks²⁴¹. Despite the fact that the status of *Arsilas* is unclear since *παλαιτέρω* could have both the meanings of the eldest or the supreme ruler, most scholars²⁴² prefer the first view. Moreover, while the name *Arsilas* is commonly connected with the Türk word *arslan* which means *lion*²⁴³, Beckwith believes that the particular name is the Greek rendering of the name of the ruling clan, A-shih-na²⁴⁴.

In addition, it is rather interesting the fact that all the Türk ambassadors who resided at Constantinople left *en masse* and escorted Valentinus' embassy. Although Menander does not mention anything that could justify the sudden departure of the 106 Türk envoys, it can be inferred from the hostile reception of Valentinus by Turxanthus, that the Byzantine- Türk relations had become strained for some reason²⁴⁵. So, it is likely that either a certain Türk envoy was deliberately dispatched in the Byzantine capital in order to carry the Khagan's order for the immediate withdrawal of all the Türk ambassadors or the Türk envoy who accompanied the penultimate Byzantine ambassador in his return journey at Constantinople was entrusted with this task²⁴⁶.

Turxanthus was the first Türk leader whom Valentinus met. When the Byzantine envoys presented their credentials and announced the Tiberius' ascension to the Byzantine throne, they requested that Turxanthus reconfirm the treaty that had been made earlier between Justin II and Silzibul, when Zemarchus visited their land. On that occasion, Silzibul had declared that he would have the same friends and enemies with the Byzantines and that his decision would be unbreakable and

²⁴¹ Menander 19.1, 172. "Ἀρσίλας δὲ ὄνομα τῷ παλαιτέρῳ μονάρχῳ Τούρκων".

²⁴² E. g. Menander 1985, n. 222, 276, Chavannes 1900, 240. Bury 1897, 422. "Arsilas may have been either a brother of Silzibul or a son older than Turxanth."

²⁴³ Κορδῶσης 2012, 122.

²⁴⁴ Beckwith, 1987, 206-208. Although Klyashtorny (1994, 446-447) does not reject the connection of the word *Arsilas* with a lion he proposes that the "original form of the A-shih-na name should be searched in the local Tocharian and Iranian Language".

²⁴⁵ Menander, n. 218, 275; Sinor 1977, 433.

²⁴⁶ Κορδῶσης 2012, 123-124.

inviolable²⁴⁷. Therefore, Valentinus based on the aforementioned treaty, urged the Türks to abide by the treaty and attack their mutual enemy, the Persians since the Romans were at war with them at that particular time.

Contrary to the etiquette of an embassy's reception Turxanthus behaved so coarsely and menacingly towards the Byzantine envoys that Menander characterized him as *an arrogant man who loved to boast*²⁴⁸. Extremely outraged, he accused the Byzantines of using ten tongues but one deceit, namely to lie to everyone²⁴⁹. Placing his fingers in his mouth he blamed them for deceiving every nation that mixes with them. Moreover, he added that the Byzantines on the one hand flattered all the tribes with their *various speeches and treacherous designs* but on the other they deceived them taking all the benefits for themselves, when their alleged friends fell into misfortune.

Afterwards, Turxanthus passed from general insults and concrete grievances to threats. He threatened to deprive the Byzantine envoys of their lives since they were also *dressed with lies and lie was foreign and alien to a Türk*²⁵⁰. After uttering some threats against the emperor he accused him of treachery and duplicity since the emperor was the one who had broken their earlier treaty of friendship by making an alliance²⁵¹ with the Varchonitai, even though he knew that they were their subjects, who had escaped from the Türks' sovereignty. Turxanthus continued to boast of his supremacy over the Pseudo-Avars declaring that the Varchonitai would be again his subjects and that if he sent his cavalry against them they would flee to the lower reaches of the earth; and if the Varchonitai reacted against the Türk authority, they would be killed not by sword but trampled under the hooves of the horses like the ants²⁵².

Then, Turxanthus blamed the Byzantines for yet another reason. The Byzantines used to conduct the Türk envoys through the routes traversing Caucasus, when the latter travel to Byzantium. According to him, the Byzantines were not

²⁴⁷ Menander, 19.1, 172-173.

²⁴⁸ Menander 19.1, 176-177. "ὁψαγόρας γάρ τις ἀνὴρ καὶ ἀλαζονεῖα χαίρων"

²⁴⁹ Menander 19.1, 172-174.

²⁵⁰ Menander 19.1, 174-175: "ὁθνεῖον γάρ τι καὶ ἔκφυλον ψεύδεσθαι Τούρκῳ ἀνδρί".

²⁵¹ Obolensky 1971, 168. The treaty between Bayan, the leader of the Avars and the Byzantines was concluded in 574.

²⁵² Menander 19.1, 175-176.

revealing the easier way to their land deliberately, because they thought that the roughness of the ground might deter the Türks from attacking the Roman territory. Thus, although the Byzantines were assuring that there was no other route for the Türks to take, their slaves, the Varchonitai had taken it to run away from them. Then, Turxanthus, declaring that he knew the invasion route to Constantinople- crossing the rivers Dnieper, Danube and Hebrus-, boasted full of confidence that he was no ignorant of the Byzantine *strength* since the whole world was subject to his dominion. He also emphasized on the fate of the Alans and the Unigurs, who dared to face the invincible Türk might and finally became their slaves²⁵³, indicating thereby, what the consequences of resistance to the Türks were.

Valentinus arriving as a friend of the Türks was taken aback by Turxanthus' ill-tempered and menacing outbursts which were caused by the fact the Byzantines had offered refuge to his vassals²⁵⁴. Thus, Valentinus was in an awkward predicament seeing that if he refuted the charges directly he would have acknowledged the Byzantines' weakness to control the Avars. Therefore, he used his eloquence in order to soothe Turxanthus' anger by giving a *cliché-riddled reply that carefully skirted the charges*²⁵⁵. So, in the first place he replied that the Türk Khagan's accusations were so cruel and grievous that he would prefer to die instead of hearing that his emperor rejoiced in deceit and that his envoys were liars. Moreover, he tried to convince Turxanthus not to violate the laws that protected the envoys seeing that the Byzantine came as *agents of peace*²⁵⁶, otherwise he would commit an infamy. Then, Valentinus emphasized on the fact that since Turxanthus inherited Silzibul's possessions he also inherited the paternal friends whom he ought to consider also as friends, for Silzibul with his own volition chose to be allied with the Byzantines and not with the Persians. In addition, until that moment the Byzantines had respected the alliance and maintained friendly feelings towards the Türks. Thus, Valentinus ended his speech by making an appeal to Turxanthus' *ethos* and expressing his certainty that the Türk

²⁵³ Menander 19.1, 174-177.

²⁵⁴ Sinor 1977, 433.

²⁵⁵ Menander, 10.

²⁵⁶ Menander 19.1, 176-177.

Khagan's friendship would be equally firm and that he would behave properly *towards the one close to him*.²⁵⁷

Although Turxanthus did not realized his threats to kill the envoys, he obliged them to attend Sizabul's funeral, who was ἀρτιθανής²⁵⁸. Furthermore, he order the Byzantines to slash their cheeks with own daggers in a token of a grief since the burial customs required²⁵⁹. The following days Turxanthus, sacrificed four Hunnic captives in his father's honor. After completing Silzibul's burial rites and having talked with Valentinus many times, he sent off the Byzantine embassy further into the interior of the land of the Türks, where they met with other chiefs, among which his brother Tardu²⁶⁰, who was stationed in Mount Ektel²⁶¹.

As Turxanthus was not content with making only idle treats, he declared that he would capture the town of Bosphorus, which was located on the easternmost side of the Crimean peninsula. Therefore, as soon as Valentinus left, Turxanthus dispatched Bokhan to reinforce the Türk forces under Anagai, the leader of the Utigurs who had already camped in the area. After laying the siege, the city of Bosphorus fell to them in 576²⁶². The Türks stayed at the area until 581, when they appeared before the walls of Cherson²⁶³.

So, according to Menander *the Türks had been provoked Romans*, while the Byzantine envoys were detained and ill-treated by Turxanthus²⁶⁴. Although the Byzantine delegation was insulted and mocked, they hoped that Turxanthus and his brother Tardu would keep their father's policy towards the Byzantines. Also, despite the fact that Menander does not mention anything that had been spoken between

²⁵⁷ Menander 19.1, 176-177 and n. 226, 276. According to the editor "πρός τον πέλας" appears to mean that the Türks and the Romans have interests that are close and that now, with the Türks approaching the Bosphorus, they are neighbors. Cf Kordoses 2012, 126: "πρός τον πέλας" has the meaning of the one being close together physically at this time or mentally.

²⁵⁸ Chavannes (1900, 242) claims that the death of Silzibul took place at the end of the year 575 or at the beginning of the year 576.

²⁵⁹ For the Türk burial customs see Grousset 1970, 132.

²⁶⁰ He is the khagan Tat'eu of the Chinese sources. See Chavannes 1900, 228, 242, 249; Κορδώσης 2012, 127.

²⁶¹ For Mount Ektel see Menander 1985, n. 232, 277.

²⁶² Golden 1992, 131.

²⁶³ Κορδώσης 2012, 128, Sinor 1997, 304; Sinor 1982, 490; Golden 2003a, 49; Golden 1997b, 260-261 mentions: "This was not only a blow to Constantinople's commerce but also effectively deprived them of an important and vital intelligence-gathering center in the steppe."

²⁶⁴ Menander 19.1, 178-179.

Tardu and the Byzantine delegation, it is assumed that the Türk Khagan did not disappoint them, when they met him²⁶⁵. So, the Byzantine ambassadors thought that Turxanthus' declarations to besiege the city of Bosphorus were merely threats of a subordinate arrogant ruler, otherwise, they would not be so surprised, when they saw with their own eyes the city of Bosphorus being captured by the Türks.

Nevertheless, it seems that Turxanthus served his brother's ambitious plan to dominate the whole Asia²⁶⁶. Thus, the fact that Valentinus and his escort were kept in captivity for some time during which they sustained heavy humiliations displayed the Türks' intentions to attack the Byzantine possessions²⁶⁷. Consequently, the Byzantine-Türk alliance, which lasted for eight years, came to an abrupt end.

The change of the Türk attitude towards the Byzantines had already been seen when all the Türk envoys withdrew from Constantinople and accompanied the Byzantine delegation that was dispatched to the Türk Khagan. The Byzantines were indeed in an awkward predicament seeing that on the one hand their relations with their previous allies were strained²⁶⁸ and on the other they could not repel the Persians without the Türks' aid. So, taking into account the gravity of the situation, the Byzantines chose Valentinus as the leader of the delegation in order to request the Türk Khagan to attack the Persians²⁶⁹ due to the fact that Valentinus had previous experience in the negotiations with the Türks.

Turxanthus' speech contains several clues according to which the hostile reception of the Byzantine envoys by the Türks may be explained. There is a grain of truth in Turxanthus' accusations on the Byzantines of duplicity since the latter were not always adherent to agreements that they made with other tribes²⁷⁰. The Türk leader presented as a common practice the fact that on the one hand the Byzantines

²⁶⁵ Κορδώσης 2012, 137

²⁶⁶ Κορδώσης 2012, 137: "Chinese were humbly asking for east Turkish friendship, Persians were already humiliated and now it was about the time for the Byzantines".

²⁶⁷ Κορδώσης 2012, 136.

²⁶⁸ Sinor 1977, 433.

²⁶⁹ Κορδώσης 2012, 128.

²⁷⁰ Κορδώσης 2012, 129. See also Whitby 2008, 125 "Overall there is little evidence for respect or trust in Roman dealings with European neighbours: deceit was a way to avert war, or to reduce its impact when it inevitably came, and diplomacy had to contribute to achieving these important benefits; scrupulous adherence to agreements and obligations would not have brought much advantage in this ever-changing arena"

deceived all the tribes by flattering them with their *speech* and *treacherous designs* but on the other they abandoned them after taking all the benefits for themselves²⁷¹. Indeed, the principle the “end justifies the means” was valid in the political affairs of the Byzantines with the other people²⁷². For instance, the tactic of turning the one tribe against the other such as in the case of the Utigurs and Kutrigurs, during Justinian’s reign (551), displays how the Byzantines manipulated the tribes to their own benefit²⁷³. Nevertheless, neither the Byzantines nor their tribal neighbors were expected to be reliable in terms of political obligations²⁷⁴ as the *barbarians* also deployed their own means to take advantage of the Byzantines. Bajan, for example, did not hesitate to swear the Avar and Roman oaths in his effort to conceal his plans for the construction of the bridge over Sava²⁷⁵.

The main reason for Turxanthus discontentment was the refuge that Byzantium had offered to the Varchonitai whom the Türk considered their rebellious subjects²⁷⁶. So, while the Türks demanded a stable alliance against the Avars²⁷⁷ and the Persians, who were their mutual enemies, the Byzantines violated the agreement by harboring the fugitive Avars²⁷⁸. Actually, Justin II refused to yield to the Avar demands despite Tiberius’ recommendations until 571, when the Avars had inflicted a defeat on the byzantine forces (571)²⁷⁹. Afterwards, the Avars encouraged by the Persian victories over the Byzantines (573)²⁸⁰ crossed Danube and defeated for second time the Byzantine army in 574. The disastrous outcome of the battle and Tiberius’ decision to throw the Byzantine forces into the Persian war led to the conclusion of the treaty according to which the Byzantines had to pay a yearly tribute of 80,000

²⁷¹ Menander 19.1, 174-175.

²⁷² Chrysos 1992, 29.

²⁷³ Procopius, *History of the Wars*, VIII.18.18-21.

²⁷⁴ See Whitby 2008, 125: “the Huns were greedy and unstable, the social structure of the Slavs was too anarchic to permit proper dealings, and the Avars repeatedly broke agreements and even diplomatic conventions regarding rights of ambassadors from other neighbours as well as the Romans – or this is the way in which these peoples are presented by Roman writers, a consequence both of literary stereotyping and of the ways in which relations with these relatively unstable societies were bound to change unpredictably.”

²⁷⁵ Menander 25.1, 220-221.

²⁷⁶ Sinor 1977, 433.

²⁷⁷ Vailhé 1909, 214.

²⁷⁸ See Κορδώνης 2012, 129: “Any concertation with fugitives were actions which were bringing about the anger of the other side (Attilas was asking persistently for fugitives to be delivered to him)”

²⁷⁹ Menander, 15.1, 148-149; Bury 1889, 116-117.

²⁸⁰ Νυσταζοπούλου-Πελεκίδου 1970, 147-148.

pieces of gold²⁸¹. The result of this treaty was to cease the Avar hostilities at least until 579. In addition, the Avars agreed to make a war on the Slavs, who had plundered the Roman territories, since the Byzantine army was occupied at the Persian front²⁸². So, it might be the treaty of 574 that caused the wrath of the Türks and perceived as a violation of the agreement on the part of the Byzantines²⁸³.

The second accusation of Turxanthus concerned the route that the Türk envoys were obliged to take in order to travel to Constantinople. According to Turxanthus his envoys were being escorted over the mountain Caucasus instead of being allowed to take the easier way crossing the rivers Dneiper, Danube and Hebrus²⁸⁴ under the pretext that there was no other way to travel to the Byzantine capital²⁸⁵. Turxanthus' point that the Byzantines had revealed only the way through Caucasus due to the fact that the difficult terrain would deter them from attacking the Byzantine territories may not have been unfounded. Actually, during the middle ages, delegations from inimical countries acquired topographical knowledge from the local ambassadors in order to attack other countries²⁸⁶.

However, the choice of the trans-Caucasian route in order to prevent the Türks from intelligence gathering or an imminent attack due to the difficult terrain may not have been the actual case. Valentinus had revealed to the 106 Türk envoys, who accompanied him, another route, which required navy, through Crimea. Moreover, the route through Dnieper, Danube and Hebrus was easier but much longer for delegations that had to travel eastwards. So, since the route through Crimea required the existence of a navy that the Türks could not use for war operations and the alternative route through the rivers was longer, the most common way for the Türks to travel to Constantinople was through Caucasus. So, Turxanthus' allusion to the easier route through the rivers may be perceived as a warning against Byzantium from

²⁸¹ Bury 1889, 117.

²⁸² Menander, 21, 192-193; Καρδαράς 2010, 61; Κορδώνης 2012, 130; See also, Obolensky 1971, 50: "This arrangement was for a time beneficial to both sides: for the Sclavini, massing for another major attack across the Danube, were becoming increasingly restive under Avar control."

²⁸³ Κορδώνης 2012, 130; Obolensky 1971, 168.

²⁸⁴ Menander, n. 224, 276: "The rivers Danapris (Dniepr), Danube and Hebrus (in Thrace) trace the invasion route to Constantinople itself".

²⁸⁵ Κορδώνης 2012, 130; Obolensky 1971, 168; Vailhé 1909, 213.

²⁸⁶ Κορδώνης 2012, 131.

the same direction that was already used by the Varchonitai (Avars) and other raiders when they invaded the Byzantine hinterland²⁸⁷.

In addition, the Byzantines consented unwillingly to the Byzantine –Avar treaty of 574²⁸⁸, otherwise the Empire would have been involved in a war on two fronts – against the Avars and the Persians- which exceeded the military resources of the Empire at that particular time²⁸⁹. Furthermore, the Byzantines might not be considered to have violated all the terms of the Byzantine-Türk treaty since their forces were tied up in the eastern front, waging wars against the other mutual enemy, the Persians. Consequently, Turxanthus may have used these accusations as a pretext for justifying his real intentions which were to break the alliance that was made by Silzibil and proceed to war against the Byzantines²⁹⁰.

It is quite possible that behind the words of Turxanthus there was a conflict of interests that concerned the patronage of the Alans²⁹¹ and the Unigurs tribes. The Byzantines had established friendly relations with the Alans²⁹² and the Unigurs with whose help they tried to build a new balance of power to the West of the Caspian Sea²⁹³. Thus, on the one hand the Byzantines used both allies to intercept the Türk advent²⁹⁴, on the other the Türks were extended to the west of the Caspian Sea²⁹⁵. Consequently, the Türks mutated into the Empire's enemies since they conquered the Byzantines' allies and threatened the Empire's integrity. Moreover, the Türks invaded Crimea, which was the western terminus of the northern Silk Route, aiming at having under their control silk trade from China up to the Black Sea²⁹⁶.

²⁸⁷ Kopδώσης 2012, 131.

²⁸⁸ Obolensky 1971, 169: "The Avar menace weighed heavily on its Balkan frontier, and Sirmium was already under severe pressure".

²⁸⁹ Obolensky 1971, 169.

²⁹⁰ Kopδώσης 2012, 135.

²⁹¹ Menander, n. 225, 276: "The conquest of the Alans by the Türks is dated after 572".

²⁹² The friendly relations of the Alans towards the Byzantines are shown in the warm reception of Zemarchus' envoys. Contrary to that, the Alans were very cautious to the Türk envoys who were accepted after being disarmed with Zemarchus' intervention. See Kopδώσης 2012, 113: "The Alans probably believed that sooner or later the Türks would attack them"

²⁹³ Obolensky 1971, 169.

²⁹⁴ Kopδώσης 2012, 132.

²⁹⁵ Beckwith 2009, 117: "Between 567 and 571 the Western Turks took control of the North Caucasus -Steppe, and in 576, the Western Steppe. Both regions apparently had already been populated at least partly by Turkic peoples, but now the Turks ruled over the entire Central Eurasian steppe zone".

²⁹⁶ Kopδώσης 2012, 273.

So, it was a matter of time that a conflict between the Byzantines and the Türks would break out. As long as Silzibul lived the alliance was maintained. When he died, Turxanthus found a pretext to liberate himself from complying with the terms of the treaty²⁹⁷. The Türk leader probably aware of the Byzantines' weakness,²⁹⁸ decided to extract the maximum advantage from it. Thus, the Türk forces crossed the straits of Bosphorus²⁹⁹ and conquered the city (576). The attack to the city of Bosphorus signaled the end of the Byzantine- Türk alliance³⁰⁰, albeit for a short period. By the mid 579 the Türks were at Cherson and overrun the whole Crimea.

2.6. Possible Byzantine embassy to the Türks in 579

While in 576 the city of Bosphorus was besieged and captured by the Türks, in 579, the Avars began to construct a bridge across the river Save between the cities of Sirmium and Singidunum. At that particular time the Avars considered themselves strong enough to question the Byzantine rule to the south of the Danube due to the fact that the Byzantine troops were tied up in the Eastern frontier fighting against the Persians³⁰¹. Therefore, the city of Sirmium became Baian's main objective³⁰² since, provided it was captured, it would be used as an Avar base in the North-Western Balkans from where they could lance their attacks.

When the general of Singidunum, Sethus summoned them to withdraw their forces from the river Save, warning that otherwise their actions would be considered as a violation of *a firm peace and friendship*, they justified their actions by saying that they built the bridge in order to attack the Slavs³⁰³. In spite of Baian's oaths, the Avars did not convince the Byzantine general who dispatched the Avar envoys to the Emperor. Tiberius, upon hearing their message, realized³⁰⁴ that the Avars were

²⁹⁷ Κορδῶσης 2012, 132.

²⁹⁸ Menander, 19.1, 174: "οὐκ ἄγνοῶ τὴν καθ' ὑμᾶς δύναμιν".

²⁹⁹ Menander, n. 235. The editor suggests that the Türks were able to cross the strait without difficulty because it was probable frozen. See also Chavannes 1969, 241, Vailhé 1909, 213.

³⁰⁰ Zhang Xu-shan 1998a, 289.

³⁰¹ Καρδαράς 2010, 65.

³⁰² Menander, 25.1, 218-219.

³⁰³ Menander, 25.1, 218-219; Καρδαράς 2010, 65.

³⁰⁴ Menander, 25.2, 222-223: "...διέγνω σαφῶς ὁ αὐτοκράτωρ, ὡς τὴν πόλιν τὸ Σίρμιον ἐξελεῖν βουλόμενος ἐργάζοιτο τὴν γέφυραν ἀποκολλῆσαι βουλόμενος τὴν τῶν ἀναγκαίων εἰσκομιδὴν, ὅπως λιμῶ παραστήσοιτο τὴν πόλιν..."

planning to cut off the supplies routes to Sirmium by using the bridge they built on the river Save. In this case the citizens would starve and the Avars would demand its surrender.

Seeing that the Byzantine Empire lacked even the tiniest military force at the northern frontier, Tiberius decided to take advantage of the Türk presence at the Crimean peninsula in order to intimidate the Avars³⁰⁵. Thus, pretending that he had not perceived Baian's plan he proposed them to postpone their assault against the Slaves since the Türks, who were encamped at Cherson³⁰⁶, might quickly be informed of the Avar movements and launch punitive attacks against them³⁰⁷. He also certified the envoys that he would pass any information to the Khagan when he ascertained the Türk intentions.³⁰⁸

In a few days another Avar embassy was granted an audience with the Emperor announcing that the Khagan demanded the surrender of Sirmium and the withdrawal of the Byzantine army and the citizens from the city with their belongings before the end of autumn³⁰⁹. The ambassadors justified their Khagan's claim by using two arguments. Firstly, it was considered that Sirmium rightfully belonged to the Avars seeing that it was a former possession of the Gepids, who had been conquered by them³¹⁰. Secondly, the Byzantines were obliged to comply with the Avar claims since they had not available army to oppose them³¹¹. Moreover, they emphasized on the fact that the construction of the bridge was completed and consequently they were prepared to cut the city off from the other Byzantine strongholds on the Danube.

The Byzantine emperor stunned at the Avar claims prepared for an imminent siege of

³⁰⁵ Κορδῶσης 2012, 144.

³⁰⁶ Κορδῶσης 2012, 145: "It seems that the Türks were advancing slowly at the other Byzantine possessions of Crimea and by 579-580 they were at the city of Cherson."

³⁰⁷ Κορδῶσης 2008, 113.

³⁰⁸ Menander, 25.2, 224-225: "αὐτὸς δὲ οὐ πολλοῦ χρόνου τὴν διάνοιαν γνώσεσθαι Τούρκων, ὅποι δὴ καὶ τῆς ἐφόδου τὴν ἔννοιαν ἔχοιεν, καὶ ταύτην δῆλῃν ποιήσιν τῷ Χαγάνῳ."

³⁰⁹ Menander, 25.2, 224-225; Καρδαράς 2010, 66.

³¹⁰ Menander, 25.2, 226-227; Browning 1978, 213.

³¹¹ Menander, 25.2, 224-225; Browning 1978, 213.

Sirmium. Due to the fact that there was no army in the Balkans at that time Tiberius ordered the garrison troops of Illyricum and Dalmatia to defend the city³¹². Moreover, he made an effort to recruit troops from other tribes that would attack the Avars in the rear. According to John of Ephesus Tiberius sent secretly a delegation to the Lombards requesting their help³¹³. It is also possible that the Byzantines dispatched a delegation to the Türks³¹⁴, who had advanced on the Crimean peninsula. Nevertheless, Tiberius' efforts to recruit the Lombard and the Türk help were in vein. After a siege of two years (582) Sirmium was surrendered to the Avars³¹⁵ on condition that the inhabitants would be allowed to leave³¹⁶.

2.7. Possible Byzantine embassy to the Türks in 584

(According to John of Ephesus)

Maurice concluded a treaty with the Avars (582) from the beginning of his reign. The particular treaty was maintained until 584 when the Emperor refused to consent to a further increase in the Avar subsidy fearing that the easy acquiescence would encourage further extortion³¹⁷. As a result of that, the Avars seized Singidunum, Viminacium, and other city-fortresses on the Danube. They also raided the suburbs of Anchialus, where they spent their winter, and according to John of Ephesus they prepared to besiege Constantinople³¹⁸. Thus, once more the Byzantine Empire was in a predicament having to wage wars on two fronts against the Persians and the Avars. In addition, the situation became more complicated since the Türks had occupied the Byzantine territories in Crimea and the Byzantines concluded a treaty with the Avars, who were the Türks' irreconcilable enemies.

³¹² Menander, 25.2, 226-227: "παρασκευάζετο ἐκ τῶν ἐνόντων τῇ πόλει ἀμύνειν, στρατιὰν μὲν, ὡς ἔφθην εἰρηκῶς, οὐδὲ βραχεῖάν τινα ἔχων, στρατηγοὺς δὲ καὶ ἡγεμόνας καὶ λοχαγοὺς στέλλων, τοὺς μὲν διὰ τῆς Ἰλλυριῶν, τοὺς δὲ διὰ Δαλματίας, ὡς ἂν τὴν πόλιν διὰ φρουρᾶς ἔχοιεν."

³¹³ John of Ephesus, VI, 30, 442.

³¹⁴ Menander, n. 302, 285; Καρδαράς 2010, 67; Κορδῶσης 2012, 144.

³¹⁵ Bury 1889, 118: "The loss of Sirmium is a turning-point in the history of the peninsula, as it was the most important defence possessed by the Romans against the barbarians in western Illyricum".

³¹⁶ Menander, 27.3, 240-241; John of Ephesus, VI, 32, 444-445.

³¹⁷ Bury, 1889, 118; Καρδαράς 2010, 70-71; Treadgold 1997, 228.

³¹⁸ John of Ephesus, 449; Bury, 1889, 118; Καρδαράς 2010, 71; Treadgold 1997, 228.

However, it seems that at that particular time the Byzantine-Türk relations were improved³¹⁹. Despite the fact that there are no written sources to certify an exchange of embassies, the two nation came close to each other as it can be deduced by the fact that the Türks became the only factor that limited Avar expansion in the Northern Balkans³²⁰. According to John of Ephesus the Avars were obliged to fall back to Sirmium seeing that the Türks were raiding their territories³²¹. So, as it can be inferred from the source, it is likely that Maurice dispatched a delegation (584) to the Türks or to their subject tribes, (who needed not belong to the same clan with the Türks but they might be members of other Türk tribes such as the Khazars) aiming at requiring their help in order to confront the Avar raids³²². However, the Türks did not perish the Avars *under the hooves of their horses*³²³ as they had claimed. Instead of that, they got paid with eight centenaria of gold in order to withdraw their forces from the territory³²⁴. Although the Türks came in consultation with the Avar³²⁵, the Byzantines provinces were relieved from the Avar aggressiveness at least for that moment and the Türks became a regulating factor not only in Central Asia but also in the Balkans.

To sum up, the sources make an indirect reference to the two Byzantine embassies dispatched to the Türks (the one in 579 during Tiberius' reign and the other in 584, two years after Maurice's ascension to the throne) on the occasion of the Avar raids. We cannot be sure if the embassies were sent to the khagan (Tardu) of the west

³¹⁹ The Türk unity was undermined since internal strives broke out between the western and eastern khanate caused to a great extent by the intervention of the Chinese diplomacy (see Christian 1998, 257-261; Κορδώσης 2012, 149-153.) Although it is beyond the scope of the particular study to analyze the causes of the Türk civil war, it is worth mentioning that the Türks changed their stance towards the Byzantines after their withdrawal from Crimea (581) and the loss of their suzerainty over the territories that they had conquered from the Chinese borders up to the Black Sea. Probably, the change of the Türk attitude can be attribute to the fact that the Byzantines were still engaged in the war against the Persians complying with the terms of the 568 treaty. Moreover, according to Κορδώσης (2008, 111) "the Avars were considered by the Türks not only as their long-established enemy but also as competitors force residing in the westernmost parts of their domain". Consequently, it is likely that the Türks helped the Byzantines due to fact that they could be used as their counterweigh to the Avar aggressiveness

³²⁰ Szádeczky-Kardoss 1990, 209.

³²¹ John of Ephesus 45-49 quoted by Καρδαράς 2010, 72, Κορδώσης 2012, 146.

³²² Κορδώσης 2012, 146-147.

³²³ Menander, 19.1, 174-175.

³²⁴ Καρδαράς 2010, 71-72; Κορδώσης 2012, 146-147.

³²⁵ Κορδώσης 2012, 146-147: "... it can be deduced that the Türks came in to consultations with the Avars due to economic difficulties"

wing of the Khanate of the Trüks in Central Asia (such as previous embassies) or visited the deputies of the Türks in the northern steppes of the Black Sea. However, it is more likely that the Byzantine delegations conversed with the Türks' deputies taking into consideration that Tardu was engaged with repressing the tribal revolutions in Central Asia. Therefore, at this point we rather have the prelude to the gradual withdrawal of the Turk influence from the areas to the north of the Black Sea and the development of autonomous Byzantine contacts with the nomadic steppe nations, subordinate to the Türks, who dwelt in the aforementioned territory³²⁶. As it would be seen in the next chapters from these people, the Khazars evolved into the most important allies of Byzantium.

2.8. The letter of the Türk khagan to emperor Maurice.

(According to Theophylactus Simocatta)

Despite the fact that the Western Türks did not evacuate the territories of the northern Black Sea until 590³²⁷, the relations between the two nations were improved since the Türks restricted Avar aggressiveness towards Byzantium and the Byzantines carried on their struggle against the Persians. Apart from a possible exchange of embassies (579 and 584) that concerned the Avars, who were their mutual enemy, it is of particular interest the letter that was sent by an anonymous khagan to the Byzantine emperor Maurice to declare his triumphs over his enemies via his ambassadors³²⁸.

Unfortunately, Theophylactus Simocatta, who is the main source for this letter did not provide any information on the name of the khagan, the date of the letter mission or even its precise content. He interrupts his military narrative in the summer of 595³²⁹ to make an important digression recapitulating the history of the Türk

³²⁶ Κορδώσης 2012, 146-147.

³²⁷ Grousset 1970, 130.

³²⁸ Theophylactus Simocatta, VII.6.7, 256-257: "Θέρους ἐνεστῶτος κατὰ τοῦτον δὴ τὸν ἐνιαυτὸν ὁ πρὸς τῇ ἕξ ὑπὸ τῶν Τούρκων Χαγάνος ὑμνούμενος πρέσβεις ἐξέπεμψε Μαυρικίῳ τῷ αὐτοκράτορι, ἐπιστολὴν τε συντεταχῶς ἐπινίκια ἐνεχάραττεν ἐν αὐτῇ".

³²⁹ Vaissière 2015, 91; Whitby- Whitby 1986, n. 32, 188; "...however, from the contents of the Chagan's letter, it can be calculated that the embassy must have been dispatched at the very start of Maurice's reign". Cf n. 43: "References in Chinese sources to the history of the Turks indicate that the revolt was defeated in c. 582, which provides the terminus post quem for the dispatch of the embassy".

expansion to the west in the mid-6th century. Thus, he only preserves the letter's salutation, word for word as follows: Ἡ δὲ τῆς ἐπιστολῆς ἐπιγραφὴ εἶχεν ἐπὶ λέξεως οὕτως ᾧ βασιλεῖ τῶν Ῥωμαίων ὁ Χαγάνος ὁ μέγας δεσπότης ἐπτὰ γενεῶν καὶ κύριος κλιμάτων τῆς οἰκουμένης ἐπτά³³⁰. It seems that the letter was written in the Sogdian language which was considered as the *lingua franca* of Central Asia at that particular era³³¹.

Due to the limited information there are certain disputed issues deriving from the letter. One of the most controversial issues is the name of the anonymous khagan who sent the letter³³². According to the Türk titulature, *the great lord of seven races and master of seven zones of the world* had to be the supreme leader of the Türks. The expression *master of the seven zones of the world* is found in many Arab writers designating the entire inhabited earth³³³ and it is also confirmed by the Bugut inscription³³⁴. However the *great lord of the seven races* is not mentioned in Bugut. On this topic Vaissière claims that the consequential link γάρ in the following sentence “τῷ ὄντι γὰρ τὸν ἐθνάρχην τῶν Ἀβδελῶν (φημὶ δὴ τῶν λεγομένων Ἐφθαλιτῶν) καταπολεμήσας οὗτος αὐτὸς ὁ Χαγάνος ἐνίκησε τὴν τοῦ ἔθνους ἀρχὴν περιεβάλετο” illustrates that the Türk khagan acquired these titles since he defeated the Hepthalites³³⁵.

Then, Theophylactus mentions the victorious wars that οὗτος αὐτὸς ὁ Χαγάνος waged against the nation of Abdeli whom he identifies with the Hepthalites, and the Avars³³⁶. It is worth noting that the historian uses the verbs περιεβάλετο and

³³⁰ Theophylactus Simocatta, VII.6.7, 257.

³³¹ Kljaštornyj-Livšic 1972, 70-71; Κορδῶσης 2012, n. 46, 164; Vaissière 2010, 221.

³³² While there is no consensus on the name of the khagan many scholars believe (Chavannes 1900, 249; Κορδῶσης 2012, 165) that the anonymous khagan could be identified with Tardu, who emerged as the most powerful figure of his empire after the Türk civil war. cf Vaissière (2015, 91-101 and 2010, 219-224) who makes a new hypothesis. Through the re-dating of the letter mission from 598 to 595 and on the basis of the Sogdian inscription called that of Mongolküre, he claims that that the correspondent of Maurice was not Tardu, but rather the kagan Niri, who proclaimed himself supreme khagan in the same year 595 and reigned over the northern Tianshan.

³³³ Chavannes 1900, 249.

³³⁴ Vaissière 2015, 93.

³³⁵ Vaissière 2015, 93: “The consequential link γάρ is here important. The Turkish Qaghan has these titles because he defeated the Hepthalites. It seems that Theophylact understood the name of the Hepthalites as based on Iranian Haft, seven. The question is: is he right in doing so or is this a learned but false gloss?”

³³⁶ Theophylactus Simocatta, VII.6.7, 257: “τῷ ὄντι γὰρ τὸν ἐθνάρχην τῶν Ἀβδελῶν (φημὶ δὴ τῶν λεγομένων Ἐφθαλιτῶν) καταπολεμήσας οὗτος αὐτὸς ὁ Χαγάνος ἐνίκησε τὴν τοῦ ἔθνους ἀρχὴν περιεβάλετο. ἐπὶ τῇ νίκῃ τοῖνυν εἰς μέγα ἄρθεις καὶ τὸν Στεμβισχάγαν σύμμαχον ποιησάμενος τὸ τῶν

καταδουλώσατο respectively in order to describe the type of relations that were developed after the subjugation of the two nations to the Türks. This probably means that while the rule of the Hephthalites was assumed by the khagan, the Avars were enslaved due to the fact that they inhabited his territories³³⁷. Only few of them managed to escape to the land of Taugast and the land of Mucri³³⁸. Theophylactus continues his narrative by recounting other enterprises of the Türk khagan as the latter subdued all the Ogur nations and prevailed after the civil war³³⁹. Consequently, the khagan declared these triumphs to the emperor Maurice through the Türk embassy³⁴⁰.

At this point it is worth mentioning that the reference of Simocatta to the wars that the particular Khagan waged against the Hephthalites and the Avars constitutes a non sequitur since these wars had taken place, when the Türks headed by the Khagan Ishtemi. Chavannes attributes this misconception to the Byzantine translators, who were inaccurate in the translation of the letter³⁴¹. Moreover, he considers the

Ἀβάρων ἔθνος καταδουλώσατο.” Whitby- Whitby 1986, n. 35, 188: “Theophylact was unaware of the real chronology of this account of Turkish victories, and this ignorance gave rise to his misguided speculations about the Pseudo-Avars. Menander, fr. 10 indicates that some Avars at least had fled from the expanding power of the Turks before the Turkish conquest of the Hephthalites in 558; the first Avar contacts with the Romans were in 558/9 (Menander, fr. 4). The conquests recorded in the Turkish letter may not be placed in chronological order, but in a geographical sequence...” See also Vaissière 2015, 94: It is quite possible that Theophylact put the conquest of the Hephthalites before that of the Avars because of a misleading phrase in Menander the Guardsman: “... When I have ended the war with the Ephtalites, I shall attack the Avars”.

³³⁷ Κορδώσης 2012, 165.

³³⁸ Theophylactus Simocatta, VII. 257-258.

³³⁹ Theophylactus make a reference to the *Var* and *Chunni*, who usurped the name of the real Avars in order to provoke fear and panic among the other steppe nations. According to Whitby- Whitby (1986, n. 39, 189) the story of Varchonitae appellation is invented by Theophylactus. Moreover, he describes vividly the slaughter of the Kolch nation which were “probably the Khalkh nation” (see Whitby-Whitby 1986, n. 42, 190) as the fallen corpses of this tribe extended for four days journey. Then, Theophylactus mentions that the Türks clashed in civil war. A certain man named *Turum* who was a relative of the khagan revolted against his rule. The pretender to the throne collecting great forces managed to win the battle. Therefore, the khagan requested the help of three other great khagans whose names were Sparzeugun, Kunaxolan, and Tuldich (for the khagans see Chavannes 1900, 14; Κορδώσης 2012, 169-170, Golden 2003a, 56. Vaissière 2015, 101). The rival forces clashed at the Ikar where there were large fields. The usurper’s army was decimated by the united forces of the four khagans. After the slaughter, the khagan became again the master of his country.

³⁴⁰ Theophylactus Simocatta, 7. 8-11, 259; Κορδώσης 2012, 164.

³⁴¹ Kordoses (2012, 166-167) excludes the possibility of a bad translation since the Byzantine court had experienced and highly qualified translator.cf Vaissière 2015, 95: “At one point, the mention of successive qaghans was lost in translation, so that everything was attributed to a single qaghan, contemporary of Maurice”

reference to the glorious victories of Istheimi justifiable due to the fact that the latter was the father of Tardu whom he identifies with the author of the letter³⁴².

This problem may be resolved if one takes into account that Theophylactus preserves only the letter's salutation word for word. Thus, what the historian wrote was not a precise textual reproduction of the letter, since he was probable quoting his main source from memory³⁴³. Moreover, it is not certain if Simocatta used information obtained only from the letter. It is also possible that he might have included information – especially as far as Istheimi was concerned – from the Byzantine embassies that were dispatched to the Türks³⁴⁴. Consequently, since all the events recounted by Theophylactus could not have taken place under the same khagan, who was Maurice's contemporary, it seems possible that the letter describes the history of the Türk empire's initial expansion from the 550's to the 590's³⁴⁵. In addition Kordoses believes that the phrase *οὗτος αὐτός ὁ Χαγάνος*, refers to the title of the Türk khagan in general which is equivalent with the phrases the *king or the emperor*. So, there is a general reference to all Türk khagans and a presentation of the most important historical events from the beginning of the empire that contributed to its expansion³⁴⁶.

Thus, it is possible that the letter's reference to the previous triumphs of the Türks over the nations of Central Asia aimed at highlighting the victories of the Khagan due to which he established his supremacy over the Türks. Accordingly, since he became the undisputed leader of his country after concluding the civil war, he composed this letter in order to inform the Byzantines of his recent victories against his adversaries.

The most powerful figure that was emerged after the civil war was Tardu³⁴⁷. It seems that Tardu sent the embassy to the Byzantines in 598, when the civil war between the Eastern and the Western Türks was coming to an end and he became the leader of the united Türk khaganate (uniting its eastern and western wings)³⁴⁸. Tardu

³⁴² Chavannes 1900, 249.

³⁴³ Κορδῶσης 2012, 167; Macartney 1944, 269-270.

³⁴⁴ Κορδῶσης 2012, 168.

³⁴⁵ Vaissière 2015, 95.

³⁴⁶ Κορδῶσης 2012, 167-168.

³⁴⁷ Christian 1998, 258; Chavannes 1900, 249; Κορδῶσης 2012, 165.

³⁴⁸ The chronology of the embassy mission has been a disputed matter. Chavannes (1900, 245, 249); Golden (1992, 108-109), Macartney (1944, 268), Zhang Xu-Shan (1996-1997, 220), Κορδῶσης (2012, 169) believes that the embassy was dispatched by Tardu in 598.

was at the forefront of the Türk history until 603, when he was obliged to leave his country after the great revolution of the *ten tribes*³⁴⁹. Also, it is probable that his opponent, Turum might be identified with the Khagan of the eastern Türks, Doulan³⁵⁰ with whom Tardu came in conflict between the years 592 and 597³⁵¹. After a short period of cooperation between the two khagans, Doulan was killed by his men and Tardu declared himself as the *master of seven zones of the world* namely he became – or at least he thought he became – the lord of the western and eastern Türks³⁵².

Nevertheless, there is no certainty concerning the identification of khagan. It is also possible that the particular Khagan might be the leader of the eastern Türks since according to Theophylactus, he cooperated with Ishtemi to defeat the Avars³⁵³. If it is taken into account that the khagan of the eastern Türks, Ranquian had a long-term cooperation with China and the treaties that were concluded with China after the civil war aimed at maintaining tranquility at the land of the Türks by preventing imminent uprisings, then Ranquian could be identified with the Khagan who dispatched the embassy to the Byzantines³⁵⁴.

Nevertheless, in spite of the difficulty in the identification of the khagan, the dispatch of the Türk embassy during the reign of Maurice indicates that the relations between the Türks and the Byzantines were not tensed. Actually, they had been improved before the withdrawal of the Türk forces from Crimea, when the Byzantines took advantage of the Türk presence at the particular territory in order to intimidate the Avars (584). In addition, the Byzantines, complying with the Byzantine- Türk treaty, were fighting against their mutual enemies. They succeeded not only to defeat the Persians repeatedly but also to wage wars against the Avars at the northern frontier.

³⁴⁹ Κορδῶσης 2012, 165.

³⁵⁰ Vaissière (2015, 100) also believes that Dōulán was regarded by the Chinese sources as the legitimate heir of the throne rebelled against the great Khagan.

³⁵¹ Κορδῶσης 2012, 171.

³⁵² Κορδῶσης 2012, 171.

³⁵² Κορδῶσης 2012, 171.

³⁵³ Theophylactus Simocatta, VII. 7.9, 257.

³⁵⁴ Κορδῶσης 2012, 171-172 ; Whitby- Whitby 1986, n. 32 188 ; Vaissière 2015, 92 ; Vaissière (2010, 221-224) claims that the khagan who was Maurice's correspondent, was not Tardu but rather the khagan Niri -on the basis of the Sogdian inscription called Mongolküre- who proclaimed himself supreme khagan *l'année du lièvre*. According to that particular dating system Vaissière re-dates the letter of the Khagan from 598 to 595 when the military narrative by Theophylactus had reached the summer of 595 considering the particular date as the year of Niri's accession to the throne.

Consequently, it was the right time for the Türk khagan to send the letter to his allies, whose prestige was strengthened after the successive victories, in order to communicate his triumphs against his adversaries

2.9. Brief note on the origins and the appearance of the Khazars in the Eurasian steppes

When the Western Türks arrived in the Volga River region, the Khazars were under the jurisdiction of the Western Türks³⁵⁵. Since the Türk khanate receded back into the steppes of Central Asia³⁵⁶, because it had suffered great losses due to the civil war 582-603³⁵⁷, other Turkic (mostly of Ogur stock)³⁵⁸ states arose out of the ashes of the western Türks from whom they received their administrative system, titulature and even their royal elites³⁵⁹. The Khazar khanate must have been formed as an independent polity in the mid seventh century together with the emergence of the Onogurs' state³⁶⁰. During that period the Khazars consolidated their power at the region between the Volga and the fortress city of Derbent. However, very soon warfare broke out between the newly formed polities for the dominion in the Pontic steppes until the dissolution of the of Magna Bulgaria in the 670s³⁶¹. The Khazars became the dominant power in the region having displaced the Bulgars, a number of which ruled by Baian- the oldest of Kubrat's five sons -stayed at the lands of the previously Old Great Bulgaria and paid tribute to the Khazars. Ever since their land became part of the Khazar state.

³⁵⁵ Brook 2006, 11; Dunlop 1954, 327.

³⁵⁶ Κορδώνης 2012, 147: "In the recent years some scholars believe that the ruler of the Onogur Bulgars did not rebelled against the Avars driving them out of his land,s as (the Patriarch) Nikephoros (22, 70) mentions, but against the western Türks". For further information and bibliographical references see Καρδαράς 2010, 152 -155.

³⁵⁷ Christian 1998, 284; Golden 1980, 37.

³⁵⁸ Golden 2003b, 49: "The Türks also organized the various Sabir, Ogur and other Turkic elements in the Western Eurasian steppes into a powerful confederation under the direct authority of the Yabgu Qagan. The latter was a member of the royal Ashina clan and the ruler of the western part of the Türk realm. In the course of the seventh century, two major tribal unions emerged in this region under the Türk banner: the Khazars (Q'azar) and Bulgars".

³⁵⁹ Golden 1980, 37: "the Ashina gave the Khazars their dynasty, the Tu-lu/Dulo, which also may have been a Hiung-nu royal clan, gave the Bulgars their royal family".

³⁶⁰ Christian 1998, 284; Golden 1980, 51, 1990b 264; 1992, 233; Golden 2003b, 50: "The period 630-640 marks the full emergence of the Khazar and Onogur/Onogundur-Bulgar confederations..."

³⁶¹ Golden 1990b 264-265, 1992, 233, 1980, 51.

The earliest reference to the Khazars dates from the year 555 in the Syriac Chronicle of *Zachariach of Mitylene*³⁶², in which the Khazars were listed among the nomadic tribes living in tents north of Caucasus Mountain. Theophanis Confessor believes that they were originated *ἀπὸ τοῦ ἐνδοτέρου βάθους Βερζιλίας τῆς πρώτης Σαρματίας καὶ ἐδέεσποσε πάσης τῆς περατικῆς γῆς μέχρι τῆς Ποντικῆς θαλάσσης*³⁶³. The same historian calls them either Khazars or Türks³⁶⁴ as he apparently incorporates them into the wider Türk family³⁶⁵, while Nikephoros the Patriarch of Constantinople refers to them as Türks. Unfortunately, due to the lack of written sources and other evidence, their appearance as an entity cannot be delineated precisely, since in the early stages of their history the Khazars were subjugated to the Türks. Therefore, it is not easy to disentangle the Khazars from the Türks until the seventh century given that these ethnonyms were used interchangeably in many sources³⁶⁶. In addition, the distinction between the two nations is even harder to be made because the ethnonym of the Khazars was attributed to various steppe tribes in the early sixth century³⁶⁷. Also, the references to the Khazars in the Arabic accounts of the seventh century are of dubious historical value due to the fact that these accounts were transmitted orally for over a century before being first put in writing³⁶⁸.

There have been a number of theories concerning Khazar origins but the issue is far from being resolved³⁶⁹. Thus, the Khazars may be identified with the Akatzirs, or a group of Hephthalites lived near Xurâsân which migrated westward to Caucasus in the late 5th - early 6th century and probably joined with the Sabirs and others. They

³⁶² Zachariach of Mitylene, XII.7, 328.: "the Unnogur, a people living in tents, the Ogor, the Sabir, the Bulgarian,* the Khorthrigor, the Avar, the Khasar, the Dirmar (?), the Sarurgur (?), the Bagarsik (?), the Khulas (?), the Abdel, the Ephthalite, these thirteen peoples dwelling in tents;"

³⁶³ Theophanes Confessor, 358.

³⁶⁴ Theophanes Confessor, 315: "καὶ ἐν ταύτῃ διατρίβων τοὺς Τούρκους ἐκ τῆς ἐώας, οὓς Χάζαρεις ὀνομάζουσιν," 316: "οἱ δὲ Χάζαρεις διαρρήξαντες τὰς Κασπίας πύλας ἐν Περσίδι εἰσβάλλουσιν εἰς τὴν χώραν τοῦ Ἀδραϊγάν", 317 "Ἡράκλειος σὺν τοῖς Τούρκοις ἀπροσδοκῆτως διὰ τὸν χειμῶνα εἰς ἑκστασιν ἐνέβαλε τὸν Χοσρόην τοῦτο μαθόντα.", 326: "καὶ εἰρήνην ποιῶ μετὰ τοῦ βασιλέως Ῥωμαίων καὶ μετὰ τῶν Τούρκων, καὶ καλῶς ἔχομεν ζῆσαι."

³⁶⁵ Κορδῶσης 2012, 186.

³⁶⁶ Golden 1990b, 263; Cf Κορδῶσης 2012 n.1, 183 "However, the Khazars were where known to the Chinese since in the dynastic history of the Táng there is a mention that the Northern neighbors of Bosi (Persia) and Fulin (Byzantium) are the Türk tribes of Ko-sa. See also Hirth 1885, 56.

³⁶⁷ Golden 2003b, 49.

³⁶⁸ Zuckerman 1980, 418.

³⁶⁹ The theories regarding the origins and the ethnic affiliations of the Khazars are examined by Golden 1980, 51-57.

are also associated with the Huns, the Sabirs who were Oguric people or they could be a compound of Oguric people with the Sabirs and other elements with a ruling stratum consisting of Western Türks Dunlop suggests an Uygur origin of the Khazars³⁷⁰.

Taking into account the available data, the origins of the Khazars cannot be clarified with certainty. Anthropologically the Khazars were similar to other Türk peoples of the Pontic steppes. Also, the linguistic evidence is so sparse and ambiguous that it does not offer a clue to the Khazar origins. Nevertheless, it is presumed that the Khazar khanate was a, polyglot state since its people spoke Common and Oguric Turkic languages as well as varieties of Iranian, Finnic, Ugric, Slavic and indigenous North Caucasian languages³⁷¹. Consequently, the Khazars could probably be people of Turkic stock although there were other ethnic elements such as Ugric and Iranian³⁷². Also it is likely that the Khazars either emerged from a sub-grouping of the Sabirs, who used to live in the area where the Khazars later settled or a grouping brought in by the Türks³⁷³. Also it is possible they were an amalgam of tribes, Sabirs, Oghurs, Türk led by a Türk charismatic clan, perhaps the Ashina clan. Thus, the name *Khazar* was first a political designation and only secondarily an ethnonym³⁷⁴.

The khazar khanate in its heyday dominated a vast area extending from the Volga-Don steppes to the eastern Crimea and the northern Caucasus. Its eastern frontiers were not clearly defined. They might extend into the Khwárazmsháh realm³⁷⁵. It is claimed that the nobility of the Khazars converted to Judaism in order to maintain their neutrality from the Byzantines and the Arabs who were competing to disseminate Orthodoxy or Islam and having them under their control³⁷⁶. However, the Byzantine policy was utterly pragmatic and unaffected by religious prejudices³⁷⁷. The Khazars became a constant and valuable ally for the Byzantines not only because they helped Heraclius to defeat the Persians but also because they halted the northward

³⁷⁰ Dunlop 1954, 34-35.

³⁷¹ Golden 2011, 151. For the Khazar language see Erdal 2007, 75-108.

³⁷² Christian 1998, 283.

³⁷³ Golden 1992, 236. Σπράτος (1966, 549-550) argues that the Khazars were a segment of the Western Türks, who settled between the rivers Don and Volga in the middle of the sixth century.

³⁷⁴ Golden 1990b, 263.

³⁷⁵ Golden 1990b, 264; Noonan 1992, 498.

³⁷⁶ Noonan 1999, 502: "Judaism was apparently chosen because it was a religion of the book without being the faith of a neighbouring state which had designs on Khazar lands".

³⁷⁷ Vachkova 2008, 342.

advent of the Arabs in the ensuing years³⁷⁸. The Khazar khanate was destroyed by the Kievan Rus in the middle of the tenth century.

2.10. Byzantine contacts with the Türks until 626 and its final (victorious phase) (Military alliance against the Persians, through the Khazars)

Probably, the first contacts with the Khazars were made in 624, when Heraclius recruited in his army Colchian, Iberian, and Abasgian allies in order to fight against the Persians³⁷⁹. Nevertheless, it seems that the Byzantine-Khazar alliance was officially concluded two years later³⁸⁰ in 626, as the Khazars participated in the third phase of the Byzantine-Persian war (626-628)³⁸¹. It is also accepted that in 620s the Khazars led attacks raiding Iberia, Albania and the Persian possessions in Armenia with the help of the Türk khagan³⁸². The Sassanid king Khosro II warned the Khazars that he would destroy them unless they ceased their operations against the Persians, as they finally did according to Dasxuranci³⁸³. However, Theophanes Confessor gives a different account as he claims that the Khazars invaded the land of Adrahigae plundering cities of Persia and capturing many prisoners³⁸⁴.

The Armenian historian Dasxuranci mentions that in 626 the Byzantine emperor sent a certain patrician Andrew as his ambassador *with promises of immense and countless treasure* to request help from the Khazars³⁸⁵. Despite the fact that there are not sufficient data for the place of the meeting or the content of the negotiations,

³⁷⁸ Christian 1998, 286-287. For the Byzantine-Khazar relations see Noonan 1992, 109-132. Also, Zhang 1998b, 128: "the Khazars played an important role in supplying Chinese silk to Constantinople until the eighth century".

³⁷⁹ Bury 1889, 233; Κορδώσης 2012, 198. Zuckerman 2007, 423 "The plan to engage the Turks as allies was born during the stay in Transcaucasia".

³⁸⁰ Κορδώσης 2012, 198-199; Στράτος (1966, 550) believes that it is not possible to determine with accuracy when the Byzantine -Khazar contacts concluded to an alliance. Despite that it is certain that in 627 of July the Khazars together with the Byzantines participated in joint operations against the Persians.

³⁸¹ Chavannes 1900, 252; Κορδώσης 2012, 198-199; Ζακυθηνός 1972, 108-111.

³⁸² Christian 1998, 283.

³⁸³ Movses Dasxuranci, 2.11, 82.

³⁸⁴ Theophanes Confessor, 316: "οἱ δὲ Χάζαραι διαρρήξαντες τὰς Κασπίας πύλας ἐν Περσίδι εἰσβάλλουσιν εἰς τὴν χώραν τοῦ Ἀδραϊγὰν σὺν τῷ ἑαυτῶν στρατηγῷ Ζιέβηλ, δευτέρῳ ὄντι τοῦ Χαγάνου τῇ ἀξίᾳ· καὶ ἐν οἷς ἂν τόποις διέβαινον, τοὺς τε Πέρσας ἡχμαλώτευσον καὶ τὰς πόλεις καὶ κώμας τῷ πυρὶ παρεδίδουν."

³⁸⁵ Movses Dasxuranci, 2.11, 87; Dunlop 1954, 29; Στράτος 1966, 551.

Patriarch Nikephoros refers to the same incident. He claims that from the territory of Lazica the Emperor sent gifts to the chieftain of the Türk, whom he urged to enter on an alliance against the Persians³⁸⁶. The ruler of the Khazars, Djeboukha-khan accepted to become an ally of the Byzantines and sent in response a thousand excerpt riders through Albania, Georgia and Lazica to the Byzantine capital³⁸⁷.

Although Djeboukha-khan plays an important role in the Byzantine-khazar contacts, his identity or title are much debated since there are different accounts. Dasxuranci and Theophanes note that Jebu Xak'an or Ziebel respectively was the deputy of the great khagan. More specifically, Dasxuranci mentions that Jebu Xak'an was the viceroy of the King of the North and also *second to him in kingship*. Theophanes also explains that Heraclius' ally, Ziebel was *δευτέρῳ ὄντι τοῦ Χαγάνου τῇ ἀξίᾳ*. Nikephorus, however, claims³⁸⁸ that Heraclius dispatched presents to the master, *κύριον* of the Türks. After all, the marriage between Heraclius' daughter Eudokia and the chieftain of the Türks, makes only sense if the latter was the ruler of his people³⁸⁹. Consequently, according to the medieval sources, modern scholars identify Jebu Xak'an or Ziebel either with the chieftain of the Khazars, who was appointed by the Türks as a commander of the westernmost part of their realm³⁹⁰, or

³⁸⁶ Nikephoros, 12, 54- 55.

³⁸⁷ Movses Dasxuranci 1961, 87; Chavannes 1900, 253; Στράτος 1966, 551.

³⁸⁸ Nikephoros 12, 54-55: "έντεῦθεν ἀποστέλλει δῶρα πρὸς τὸν Τούρκων κύριον, ἐπὶ συμμαχίᾳ τῇ κατὰ Περσῶν συγκαλούμενος".

³⁸⁹ Zuckerman 2007, 412.

³⁹⁰ Chavannes (1900, 255-256) believes that Djeboukha-khan of Dasxuranci is the same person with Djibgha ou, Djibghou of the Georgian Chronicles, Ziebel of Theophanes and Djepetoukh of Sébéos. Although he makes the hypothesis (1900, 228) that Ziebel was a yabghou due to the fact that all the aforementioned proper nouns derived from the personal name of the ruler and the title of jabghou - according to the language used-, he does not identify him with T'ong jabghou and he claims that Ziebel or Djeboukha-khan was the leader of the Khazars, as the narration of Theophanes and Dasxuranci confirms. Sinor (1990, 308-309) believes that since the mighty T'ong yabghou would never rank himself behind the khagan of the eastern Türks due their internal strife or he would never bow before Heraclius, Ziebel cannot be identified with T'ong yabghou. Moreover, Κορδῶσης (2012, 210-211) claims that it is almost impossible that T'ong yabghou went to Caucasus in person while he was trying to consolidate his power over Bactria and the Persian borders. Also, it was a common practice for the western Türks to have someone in charge of the western part of their territory despite the fact that the decisions were made only by the Khagan. Turxanthus, for instance, who was the chief of the military operations in Crimea he was given orders by the khagan of the western Türks, Tardu. Consequently, Ziebel may have been a deputy of the western khagan in the region of the Khazars or more specifically the Türk governor of the Khazars since the latter were subjected to the Türks until 650. Thus, the Byzantines and the Türks communicated with each other through the Khazars in order to destroy the Persians who were their common enemy.

with T'ong jabgou, the khagan of the western Türks³⁹¹. However, what is primarily important here is the continuation of the Byzantine- Türk alliance since both allies decided to co-operate in order to place their common enemy in the crossfire. Thus, regardless of whether Ziebel was the chieftain of the Khazars, or the Türks' deputy or the khagan T'ong jabgou, the Khazars were following the orders from the western Türks, seeing that they were under the Türk control.

After the conclusion of the Byzantine –khazar alliance, the Khazars participated in the Byzantine counter-attack against the Persian Empire. In 627, according to Dasxuranci, the king of the North dispatched the promised army, appointing his nephew Chath (the son of Djeboukha-khan) as its leader³⁹². Sébéos mentions that the Armenians were under the leadership of Cepetux of China due to the fact that after their revolution against the Persians they served the grand khagan of the North regions³⁹³. Chavannes claims that *Chath* was the Türk title of *şad*³⁹⁴ while Stratos identifies Cepeteux of Sébéos with Chath of Dasxuranci since in many cases Central Asian peoples are mentioned as Chinese³⁹⁵.

Therefore, in the spring of 627, the Khazars headed by Chath and helped by the Armenians raided all the regions of Albania and a part of Atrapatacan³⁹⁶. More specifically, after traversing the region of Caucasus, they approached at the Caspian Gates where they conquered the stronghold of Derbent, which was the only gate to

³⁹¹ Stratos (1966, 556) believes that Jebu or khagan Jabgu of Moses is the title of the ruler of the Western Türks and not the name of the Khazar leader. Since Ziebel of Theophanes was second in rank after the khagan, he should have ruled the western Türks having the inferior title of yabghou, while the supreme ruler of all the Türks was the King of the North. Therefore, he identifies Ziebel as T'ong yabghou. Bombaci (1970, 7-24) defends the aforementioned identification arguing that there is no reason to attribute to Djeboukha-khan any Khazar connection since Khosro II calls him brother due to the fact that the Türk and Persian royal families were connected through the marriage between the daughter of Khosro I and Ishtemi. Moreover, taking into consideration the distinction that Dasxuranci makes between the King of the North and the viceroy Jebu Xak'an as well as the corresponding one made by Theophanes according to which Ziebel was second in rank he identifies Ziebel or Jebu Xak'an with T'ong yabghou and the *King of the North* of Dasxuranci or *le roi des régions du Nord* of Sébéos with the ruler of the eastern or northern Türks, Hsieh-li Khagan.

³⁹² Movses Dasxuranci 1961, 88.

³⁹³ Sébéos, XIX, 52.

³⁹⁴ Chavannes 1900, 254.

³⁹⁵ Στράτος 1966, 554; Κορδώςης 2012, 200; Κραλίδης 2003, n. 71, 80; See also Golden 1980, 206: "The title *şad* was widely repanded in the early Medieval Turkic world. Amongst the Khazars, up to the ninth century, its bearer is everywhere mentioned as the second in power after the khagan. In Movses Dasxuranc'i the *şad* appears as the nephew of Jebu Xak' an (Jabgu Qagan) the ruler of the West Kök Türks and the Khazars".

³⁹⁶ Movses Dasxuranci, 2.12, 88; Chavannes 1900, 254.

the fertile land to Aghavanie (modern Azerbaijan). Then, the Khazars invaded and plundered thoroughly the land of Aghavanie³⁹⁷ in order to be given to Heraclius the required time to be prepared for the decisive campaign against the Persians³⁹⁸. In June 627 Ziebel having under his command Türk and Khazar troops invaded Albania, and joined his forces with Chath. The joined forces of the Khazars besieged and conquered the capital of Albania, Partav, in which the Aghvanian forces had withdrawn after the fall of Derbent³⁹⁹.

In the meantime Heraclius proceeded from Lazica to Iberia, where he allied with minor rulers of the area except for Stephan, who was a tributary to Khosro II. In the summer of 627 the Byzantine emperor met the chief of the Khazars, Ziebel under the walls of the besieged capital of Iberia, Tbilisi⁴⁰⁰. The meeting between Heraclius and Ziebel is described by Nikephoros and Theophanes who claimed that Ziebel and his host bowed before the byzantine emperor⁴⁰¹. It is probable that the almost theatrical encounter of the besiegers aimed at undermining the morale of the defenders. Moreover, Theophanes adds that Ziebel, who had with him his teen son, embraced Heraclius' neck⁴⁰². Nikephoros also mentions that Heraclius called the Türk khagan *his own son* and crowned him with his own diadem⁴⁰³. During the ensuing feast the Türk lords received ample gifts in the shape of earrings and clothes. The Byzantine

³⁹⁷ Theophanes, 316.

³⁹⁸ Κραλίδης 2003, 80.

³⁹⁹ Κορδώνης, 2012, 204; Κραλίδης 2003, 80.

⁴⁰⁰ Chavannes 1900, 254; Στράτος 1966, 557.

⁴⁰¹ Theophanes Confessor, 316: “ὁ δὲ Ζιέβηλ τοῦτον ἰδὼν καὶ προσδραμὼν κατασπάζεται αὐτοῦ τὸν τράχηλον καὶ προσεκύνησεν αὐτόν, ὁρῶντων τῶν Περσῶν ἐκ τῆς πόλεως τοῦ Τιφίλιος πᾶς δὲ ὁ λαὸς τῶν Τούρκων εἰς γῆν πεσόντες πρηνεῖς, ἐκταθέντες ἐπὶ στόμα τὸν βασιλέα ἐτίμων τιμὴν τὴν παρ' ἔθνεσι ξένην. ὁμοίως καὶ οἱ ἄρχοντες αὐτῶν ἐπὶ πετρῶν ἀναβάντες τῷ αὐτῷ σχήματι ἔπεσον.” See also Nikephoros, 12, 54-55: “ἐν τούτῳ ἦσθεις Ἡράκλειος ὤρμησε καὶ αὐτὸς πρὸς αὐτόν, κάκεῖνος τὴν τοῦ βασιλέως παρουσίαν ἀκηκοὺς σὺν πλήθει Τούρκων πολλῶ τῷ βασιλεῖ ὑπηντίαζε, καὶ ἀποβάς τοῦ ἵππου τῷ βασιλεῖ κατὰ γῆς προσκυνεῖ. ἐποίει δὲ τοῦτο καὶ ὁ σὺν αὐτῷ πᾶς ὄχλος.”

⁴⁰² Theophanes Confessor, 316: “προσήνεγκε δὲ ὁ Ζιέβηλ καὶ τὸν ἑαυτοῦ υἱὸν ἀρχιγένηιον τῷ βασιλεῖ, ἡδυνόμενος τοῖς τούτου λόγοις καὶ ἐκπληττόμενος τὴν τε θέαν καὶ τὴν φρόνησιν αὐτοῦ”.

⁴⁰³ Μωυσίδου (1995, 278-281) analyzes the importance and the political dimensions of Ziebel's invocation as *son* of the emperor and his coronation. Very briefly she claims that the invocation of the khazar Ziebel as the emperor's *τέκνον ἴδιον* does not have any further political meaning, otherwise its consequences would be detected in Nikephoros or in later sources as the khazar khanate from this early stage would have integrated into the Byzantine commonwealth. Thus, Ziebel accepted the particular title because the act of veneration confirmed his friendship with the emperor. She concludes that: “The lord who receives from the hand of the emperor the crown and the invocation *son* would in this case be - or even become - more than a barbarian ally. The specific case of spiritual affinity which would justify the title of *son* does not exist here since Khazars are of a different religion”

emperor, for fear of suffering the same fate as with the Avar chief, promised his daughter Eudocia (or Epiphania) to be given in marriage to the Türk chief⁴⁰⁴ in order to make the agreement more binding⁴⁰⁵. The promise on the part of Heraclius to marry his only daughter⁴⁰⁶ with the Türk leader *indicates the high value set by the Byzantine Court on the Khazar alliance*⁴⁰⁷.

The meeting ended with the conclusion of the alliance between the two leaders and the siege of Tbilisi⁴⁰⁸, which was a disputed area between Byzantium and Persia⁴⁰⁹. Despite the common efforts the besiegers failed to capture the city. According to Dasxuranci when the defenders realized that their enemies were exhausted and left, they began to parody the defeat. They painted caricatures of the emperor and Jebu Xak'an on huge pumpkins which they speared to pieces⁴¹⁰. While the same writer narrates that the following year the Khazars came back and stormed the city successfully, other sources claim that the Khazars continued the siege of Tbilisi until its fall. During the siege the Khazars were helped by Ardanases, who was in charge of the byzantine forces.⁴¹¹ Nevertheless, one way or another, it is certain that Tbilisi was captured in the spring 628⁴¹². Although the inhabitants surrendered without further resistance they were ferociously massacred⁴¹³.

⁴⁰⁴ Στράτος (1966, 560) believes that Heraclius must have promised his daughter to the son of Ziebel since the latter was too old to marry Eudocia.

⁴⁰⁵ Nikephoros, 12, 56-57. “ὁ δὲ βασιλεὺς τὸ ὑπερβάλλον τῆς τιμῆς θεασάμενος ἐδήλου αὐτῷ ὡς εἰ τὰ τῆς φιλίας αὐτῷ βέβαια εἶη, καὶ ἐποχούμενον πλησιάζειν, καὶ ἅμα τέκνον ἴδιον ἀποκαλῶν. οὕτως οὖν οὗτος ἀσπάζεται τῷ βασιλεῖ. ὁ δὲ ὄν περιέκειτο στέφανον τῆς κεφαλῆς λαβὼν τῇ τοῦ Τούρκου κεφαλῇ περιέθετο, συμποσιάσας τε αὐτῷ πάντα τὰ εἰς ὑπηρεσίαν τοῦ συμποσίου σκεύη ἅμα καὶ στολῇ βασιλικῇ καὶ ἐνῳτίοις ἐκ μαργάρων κεκοσμημένοις δωρεῖται αὐτῷ. ὡσαύτως δὲ καὶ τοὺς περὶ αὐτὸν ἄρχοντας τοῖς ὁμοίοις ἐνῳτίοις αὐτοχειρίᾳ ἐκόσμη. εἶτα δεδιὼς μὴ τὰ αὐτὰ τῷ Ἀβάρῳ καὶ παρ' ἐκείνου πείσεται, ἐπικρατέστερα δ' αὐτῷ καὶ τὰ τῆς συμβάσεως ἀπεργάζεται, παραδείκνυσιν αὐτῷ τῆς θυγατρὸς Εὐδοκίας εἰκόνα”.

⁴⁰⁶ Koestler 1976, 8: “However, the marriage came to naught because Ziebel died while Eudocia and her suite were on their way to him”. See also Κορδῶσης, 2012, 206.

⁴⁰⁷ Koestler 1976, 8.

⁴⁰⁸ Movses Dasxuranci 12, 85: “After this the floods rose and rushed over the land of Georgia and encircled and besieged the luxurious, prosperous, famous, and great commercial city of Tiflis.”

⁴⁰⁹ Christian 1998, 283.

⁴¹⁰ Movses Dasxuranci, 11, 86; Chavannes 1900, 254; Κορδῶσης 2012, 206; Στράτος 1966, 561.

⁴¹¹ Heraclius had appointed Ardanases as the commander of Iberia after the death of Stephanus who had co-operated with the Persians. See Κορδῶσης, 2012, 206; Stratos 1966, 562.

⁴¹² Στράτος 1966, 563.

⁴¹³ Movses Dasxuranci, 14, 94-95; Christian 1998, 284: “In the same year the Khazars stormed Tiflis successfully, put its inhabitants to the sword, and punished its Persian commanders for the insults they had suffered the previous year. The Yabghu Khan had blinded, then tortured them to death, skinned them, stuffed their skins with hay, and hung them above the city walls”.

In the mid- September 627⁴¹⁴, while Ziebel continued the siege, Heraclius set out from Tbilisi having left behind a minor part of his forces and Ardanases as a commander of Iberia. With the bulk of his army⁴¹⁵ and 40,000 Khazars he began his expedition against the Persians⁴¹⁶. The Byzantine troops advanced at the region of Gogovit where they rested and joined with the forces of Heraclius' brother, Theodore⁴¹⁷. While the assistance of the Khazars was critical to the accomplishment of this expedition, Theophanes makes the surprising statement that the Khazars returned home in the view of winter and the constant attacks of the Persians that they could not bear⁴¹⁸.

Except for Theophanes' mentioning there is no other reference to the early leaving of the Khazars from the expeditionary force of Heraclius. Nikephoros, Georgius Monachus and Leon Grammatikos claim that Heraclius along with the Türks invaded Persia and destroyed their cities⁴¹⁹. Also, there are contradictory sources on this issue. Thus, Sébéos and Ardzrouni ignore the Khazars at this phase of the campaign, while Michael Syros, Bar Hebraeus and Al Makine speak of the Khazar participation as far as Ctesiphon⁴²⁰.

According to Stratos, Theophanes' chronology of the Khazar, retreat almost at the beginning of the expedition, is implausible. The army of Heraclius did not encounter either the dire conditions of winter until they bivouacked in the houses of Ganzak⁴²¹ or the Persian assaults. Therefore, taking also into consideration

⁴¹⁴ Κορδώσης 2012, 207; Στράτος 1966, 562.

⁴¹⁵ The exact number of expeditionary troops, whom Heraclius commanded was probably 20,000 among which there were Lazs Abkhazians, and Iberians apart from the Byzantines. See Theophanes Confessor, 309, Κορδώσης 2012, 207. Ostrogorsky 1978, 168.

⁴¹⁶ For the possible course that Heraclius took see Kaegi 2003, 158-160, Στράτος 1966, 568-570.

⁴¹⁷ Kaegi 2003, 158; Κορδώσης 2012, 207.

⁴¹⁸ Theophanes Confessor, 317: "οἱ δὲ Τοῦρκοι τὸν τε χειμῶνα ὀρῶντες καὶ τὰς συνεχεῖς ἐπιδρομὰς τῶν Περσῶν, μὴ ὑποφέροντες συγκοπιᾶν τῷ βασιλεῖ ἤρξαντο κατ' ὀλίγον ὑπορρέειν, καὶ πάντες ἀφέντες αὐτὸν ὑπέστρεψαν".

⁴¹⁹ Nikephoros, 12, 56-57: "εὐθὺς οὖν ἄρχοντα καὶ πλῆθος Τούρκων τῷ βασιλεῖ παραδίδωσι· σὺν αὐτοῖς τε εἰς τὴν Περσικὴν εἰσβαλὼν τὰς τε πόλεις καθήρει καὶ τὰ πυρεῖα διέστρεφεν." Georgius Monachus, Vol.II, 670. Στράτος 1966, 573-574; .Κορδώσης 2012, 208.

⁴²⁰ Στράτου 1966, 573-574.

⁴²¹ *Chonicon Paschale*, 732. "εἰ γὰρ συνέβη ἡμᾶς ὀλίγας ἡμέρας ἐμβραδῦναι ἐπὶ τὰ μέρη τοῦ Ζᾶρα, καὶ εἴθ' οὕτω γενέσθαι τὸν χειμῶνα, δαπανῶν τοσούτων μὴ εὕρισκομένων ἐν τοῖς τόποις ἐκείνοις, εἰς μεγάλην βλάβην εἶχεν ἐλθεῖν τὰ εὐτυχέστατα ἡμῶν ἐκστρατεύματα. ἐξότε γὰρ ἐκινήσαμεν ἐκ τοῦ Σιαρσοῦρων, τουτέστιν ἀπὸ τῆς κδ' τοῦ φεβρουαρίου μηνός, μέχρι τῆς λ' τοῦ μαρτίου μηνός οὐκ ἐνέδωκεν χιονίζειν. ἀλλὰ διὰ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐλθόντες ἐπὶ τὰ μέρη τοῦ Κανζάκων ἠύραμεν δαπάνας πολλὰς καὶ ἀνθρώπων καὶ ἀλόγων, καὶ ἐν αὐτῇ τῇ πόλει τοῦ Κανζάκων ἐμείναμεν, τελεία οὔση καὶ ἐχούση

Theophanes' information that Kavad would make an alliance with the Romans and the Türks, he concludes that probably there is a mistake on Theophanes' account which may be detected either at the sources that Theophanes used or at the copy of the original text. Consequently, Stratos claims that the Khazars left Heraclius' army not before January 628⁴²².

The battle of Nineveh, fought in December, was the most decisive engagement between Heraclius and Khosro's troops during which the Persians suffered great losses. After the retreat of the Persians, Heraclius seized Dastagerd⁴²³, which was Khosro's favorite palace and advanced on Ctesiphon⁴²⁴. Although he could have tried to lay siege to the Persian capital, he chose to turn back to Atropatene and prevent any Persian counter-force from blockading them⁴²⁵. In the meantime Khosro II was overthrown by his primogeniture son Kavad Siroes, who executed him with his eighteen sons. In little more than a month both parties concluded a treaty and Kavad abandoned the conquest of his father. Therefore, the borderline between Persia and Byzantium was restored as it had been in 602⁴²⁶.

The Khazars invaded Iberia after their withdrawal from Heraclius' army. Their presence was consolidated at the Caucasian lands not only due to the collapse of the

περὶ τοὺς τρισχιλίους οἴκους, καὶ ἐν τοῖς πέριξ χωρίοις, ὥστε δυνηθῆναι ἡμᾶς τοσαύτας ἡμέρας ἐν ἐνὶ τόπῳ ἐπιτοῖσθαι”.

⁴²² Στράτος 1966, 573-574; Κορδῶσης 2012, 208. See also Zuckerman 2007 416: “Theophanes probably knew—perhaps from Heraclius’ previous dispatch which is now lost—that the Turks had left with the winter snows, but, confused by this very late winter (in March) and by the double stay in Ganzak (at the beginning and the end of the campaign of 627/8), he made the Turks “slip away” on eve of the first stay, before the normal winter season. This allowed him to construct the victory over Persia as an exclusive deed of Heraclius’ Christian troop.”

⁴²³ Theophanes Confessor, 322: “ἐν Δασταγέρδ ἦν τὰ βασιλεία αὐτοῦ; εὖρον δὲ οἱ λαοὶ τῶν Ῥωμαίων ἐν τῷ παλατίῳ αὐτοῦ ἐν τῷ Δασταγέρδ τριακόσια βάνδα Ῥωμαίων, ἅπερ ἐν διαφόροις χρόνοις ἔλαβον· εὖρον δὲ καὶ εἶδη ἀπομείναντα, ἀλόην πολλὴν καὶ ξύλα μεγάλα ἀλόης ἀπὸ ἐβδομήκοντα καὶ ὀγδοήκοντα λιτρῶν καὶ μέταξιν πολλὴν καὶ πίπερ καὶ χαρβάσια καμίσια πολλὰ ὑπὲρ τὸ μέτρον, σάχαρ τε καὶ ζιγγίβερ καὶ ἄλλα εἶδη πολλὰ. τινὲς δὲ καὶ ἄσιμον, καὶ ὀλοσήρικα ἱμάτια, νακοτάπητά τε καὶ ταπήτια ἀπὸ βελόνης πλῆθος πολὺ καὶ καλὰ πάνυ, ἅπερ διὰ τὸ βάρος πάντα κατέκαυσαν.”

⁴²⁴ Kaegi 2003, 179; Treadgold 1997, 298-299; Κορδῶσης 2012, 208-209; Στράτου 1966, 621-632;

⁴²⁵ Zuckerman 2007, 417: “The decisive role of the Turkic allies in the campaign of 627/8 also explains why Heraclius, once deprived of their support, attempted no military action against the Persians and agreed to a border settlement that wiped all territorial gains made under Mauricius.” See also Kaegi 2003, 179; Treadgold 1997, 299.

⁴²⁶ Treadgold 1997, 299: “These terms served the interests of both sides. Kavad had little control over Syria and Egypt, which were in hands of Shahrvaraz, and Heraclius had good reason not to humiliate a complaisant king by demanding further concessions.”

Persian Empire but also through raids in 'Albania'⁴²⁷, Iberia and a part of Armenia⁴²⁸. These predatory raids halted in 630, when civil war broke out within the state of Western Turks⁴²⁹. Nevertheless, the control of these wealth lands enhanced the influence and the independence of the Khazars, when the Western Türks were falling apart⁴³⁰.

⁴²⁷ Christian 1998, 284: "The Khazar invasion of Albania caused terrible famine, in which people were forced to eat leather and bark as well as the flesh of death". See also Movses Dasxuranci 1961, 94-101.

⁴²⁸ Al-Baladhuri, *Kitab Futuh al-Buldan* 1916, 305, 309.

⁴²⁹ Κραλίδης 2003, 106.

⁴³⁰ Christian 1998, 284.

Chapter 3

The political and economic repercussions of the Byzantine- Türk alliance

3.1. Brief note on Byzantine Diplomacy⁴³¹

Byzantium was at the forefront of history for more than a thousand years. Throughout its existence the empire was doomed to wage wars against its invaders on more than one fronts at a time. However, against these odds, Byzantium managed to survive -as long as it did- not necessarily due to its military supremacy at the battlefields but mostly due to the fact that it resorted to diplomacy in order to make peace with imminent intruders who used to come at its borderlands through the steppe corridor. Thus, Byzantium's struggle to preserve its boundaries became the primary objective of Byzantine diplomacy which Obolensky named as *defensive imperialism*⁴³².

The defensive policy⁴³³ of the Byzantine empire is also stressed by other scholars⁴³⁴ who point out that war was considered by the Byzantines as a deadlock since the outcome of losing a war was irreversible while an imminent victory did not prevent the defeated enemy from plundering the Byzantine frontier regions⁴³⁵. Moreover, wars were costly especially for a state whose basic income derived from agricultural production, which was vulnerable to man-made and natural disasters⁴³⁶. Above all, the Byzantines had realized that they had only limited sources to allocate on its northern and eastern fronts for their soldiers were outnumbered while the

⁴³¹ For a detailed analysis of Byzantine diplomacy see *Byzantine Diplomacy. Papers from the Twenty-fourth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, Cambridge, March 1990*, Aldersot 1992.

⁴³² Obolensky 1963, 52; Obolensky 1971, 47.

⁴³³ The change of the aims of the Roman foreign policy from imperialistic to defensive ones was even obvious in Justinian I's reign, who was considered as the architect of Byzantine diplomacy. During the last ten years of his rule the aged emperor avoided any military effort and preferred to divide his enemies by making them fight against one another or offered large concessions to them in order to ensure peace. See Agathias, V.14.1.

⁴³⁴ Eg. Cimbala 2008, 3. Chrysos, 1992, 25-40. Haldon 1999, 34-67. Kazhdan 1992, 3-24.

⁴³⁵ Haldon 1999, 36.

⁴³⁶ Haldon 1999, 36.

enemies were inexhaustible⁴³⁷. During the sixth century the Empire was in an awkward predicament. On the one hand the Byzantium was almost permanently tied up in the eastern frontier in its effort to defend the wealthy provinces of Syria and Egypt from the Persians. On the other, the Byzantine foreign policy was striving to establish peaceful relations with the northern neighbors in order to avoid waging wars on two fronts. Since Byzantium could not succeed in halting the barbarian incursions and fighting against Persia simultaneously, it had to rely on others to fight its battles⁴³⁸. So, aiming at avoiding warlike confrontations and preserving a balance of power either on eastern or northern front, the Byzantines attempted to recruit allies⁴³⁹

Within this context, Byzantium's relations with the Türks, which culminated into joint military operations against Sassanid Persia in Heraclius' war, had multiple effects not only on Byzantium's Middle Eastern front but also on that of the Balkans and on economy, as well.

3.2 .Repercussions on Economy

The reasons for the development of the Byzantine-Türk relations were partially economic since both allies were interested in silk trade. Indeed, silk was one of the most important commodities that the Byzantine Empire was striving to import. The silk attires became a medium for the Byzantines to display their high social status while the murex dyed purple silks were established as royal insignia⁴⁴⁰. Silk garments were so bound to the Imperial living that they were worn by officers according to their rank upon the battlefield or by the clergy during the divine service seeing that it became a prime requirement for ecclesiastic ceremonies⁴⁴¹. Except for building and strengthening the royal and ecclesiastical hierarchies silk was used as a means of payment and diplomacy⁴⁴². It was granted to the foreign courts as a valuable

⁴³⁷ Cimbala 2008, 2; Haldon 1999, 3; Haldon 2002, 33; Luttwak 2009, 56.

⁴³⁸ Eg. Obolensky 1971, 47: "In 545 Justinian offered the Antes a considerable sum of money, lands on the northern bank of the lower Danube and status of imperial *foederati* on condition that they guarded the river against the Bulgars.

⁴³⁹ Luttwak 2009, 417. "In recruiting allies to attack the enemy, his allies are the most useful recruits because they are nearest and know best how to fight the enemy's forces".

⁴⁴⁰ Muthesius 1992, 100; Zhang 1998, 212; Xinru 1996, 80.

⁴⁴¹ Lopez 1945, 1; Muthesius 1992, 100.

⁴⁴² Laiou 2002, 702.

diplomatic gift in order to establish, maintain a political alliance or to stave off imminent military attacks⁴⁴³.

Although Byzantium was the largest consumer of silk, its supply often tended to fall below the demand. The Byzantine merchants could not take the risk to transverse the whole latitude of Asia in order to purchase silk. The trip to China was far away from the Byzantine provinces⁴⁴⁴ and dangerous due to the weather conditions, the difficult terrain, the possible attacks of thieves or the regional wars that would jeopardize the success of every mission⁴⁴⁵. Apart from long and dangerous, the journey was also expensive since the middlemen raised the original cost of the valuable merchandise and the Persians imposed heavy taxes upon those who crossed their territory⁴⁴⁶. In fact, the Sassanids were not only the main intermediaries of silk but also they regulated the quantities or the prices of raw silk or textiles that were imported to the Byzantine Empire,⁴⁴⁷ since they had under their control the central Silk Road⁴⁴⁸, which according to Cosmas Indicopleustes was the shortest way from the silk producing countries to Byzantium⁴⁴⁹. Thus, one of the major issues that concerned the Byzantine-Persian relations⁴⁵⁰ was the agreement on the conditions under which the purchase of silk would be conducted. The treaty of 562 for instance⁴⁵¹ among the others designated the customs⁴⁵² through which the silk could pass, the tariffs or the people who carried on trade on behalf of the state for both countries⁴⁵³. Nevertheless, the bilateral agreements were frequently violated since silk imports depended solely on the Persians' disposal, who raised the price of silk or interrupted any purchase, when the two opponents were at war⁴⁵⁴. The rise of price in raw silk or textiles caused

⁴⁴³ Muthesius 1992, 101-102; Zhang 1998, 212; Xinru 1996, 80.

⁴⁴⁴ Cosmas Indicopleustes, II. 138.

⁴⁴⁵ Κορδῶσης 2002, 171.

⁴⁴⁶ Oikonomides 1986, 33;

⁴⁴⁷ Κορδῶσης 2002, 170.

⁴⁴⁸ Oikonomides 1986, 33. For the land or sea Silk Routes see Chen Zhi-Qiang 1994, 149-164; Κορδῶσης 1996, 114-141; Κορδῶσης 2002, 161-184.

⁴⁴⁹ Cosmas Indicopleustes II. 138.

⁴⁵⁰ For the commercial relations between Byzantium and Persia from 298-562 see Συνέλλη, 1986, 85-98.

⁴⁵¹ Συνέλλη, 1986, 95-98.

⁴⁵² The Persian town of Nisibis, Artaxata and the imperial town of Callinicum were the only places that traders from both empires made their transactions. See Vasiliev 1950, 359.

⁴⁵³ For Kommerkiarioi, who carried on silk trade on behalf of the Byzantine Empire see Oikonomides 1986, 33-53.

⁴⁵⁴ Oikonomides 1986, 33.

the Roman economy to bleed since large sums of money were spent for the acquisition of this luxury product. Not to mention that the supply of raw materials for the silk weaving industry was a serious issue for its survival and development⁴⁵⁵.

The Byzantine Empire, therefore, made repeated attempts to bring prices down by establishing direct state control over the buying of silk and to avert what today could be called “capital outflows”. The *Kommerkiarioi* were appointed by the state in the market towns along the frontiers to supervise the foreign trade. They were the only persons in the Empire authorized to buy silk from the foreign merchants or to refuse to make any purchase until they succeeded in moderating prices for the state’s as well as for their own benefit⁴⁵⁶. Apart from the *Kommerkiarioi* the state intervened through legislation that forbade citizens to buy silk directly from the *barbarians* and punished them by exile or confiscation of their properties⁴⁵⁷. In the meantime, the war with Persia that broke out in 540 disrupted trade transactions. Thus, Justinian I took advantage of silk material shortage and made not only the supply of silk but also silk manufacture a state monopoly⁴⁵⁸ fixing the ceiling price at a low level with the hope that he would prevent illegal imports of silk. Nevertheless, his measures resulted in the creation of black market and the destruction of private weaving workshops⁴⁵⁹. The textiles workers were obliged either to leave for Persia or in the best case to work in the imperial factories⁴⁶⁰.

Alongside these measures, Justinian tried to introduce sericulture in the Empire⁴⁶¹ in his effort to reduce the Byzantine dependence on imports from Persia. Although imports of raw silk remained significant, Byzantine silk production took its first steps and in the following years it developed into a major economic factor⁴⁶². Moreover, the

⁴⁵⁵ Oikonomides 1986, 42; Xinru 2010, 74. See also Lopez 1945, 2: “...the cloth industry was the source of livelihood and prosperity. Even the Byzantine lower classes, whether they realized or not, enjoyed the benefits of financial stability and political prestige...”

⁴⁵⁶ Oikonomides 1986, 33-34.

⁴⁵⁷ Oikonomides 1986, 33-34; Lopez 1945, 11; Zhang 1998a, 216.

⁴⁵⁸ Bury 1958, 331: “Peter Barsymes, who was Count of the Sacred Largesses in A.D. 542, took advantage of the crisis to make the manufacture of silk a State monopoly, and some of the private industries which had failed were converted into government factories. See also Evans 1996, 95; Lopez 1945, 4; Zhang 1998a, 216.

⁴⁵⁹ Oikonomides 1986, 34; Zhang 1998a, 217.

⁴⁶⁰ Procopius *Secret History* XXV. 13-25; Lopez 1945, 11;

⁴⁶¹ Procopius *De Bello Gothico* IV. 17; Theophanes Byzantius, 3, 270. According to Κορδώνης (1996, 153) the silkworm eggs and the expertise in sericulture came from Serinda. See also Zhang 1998a, 265-273.

⁴⁶² Oikonomides 1986, 34.

Byzantines attempted to evade the Persian monopoly by making alliances with people who could act as their intermediaries and transfer the valuable material but with no sizable success. Zacharias of Mitylene mentions the existence of Byzantine-Hephthalite contacts ⁴⁶³ before the exchange of Byzantine-Türk embassies in the last third of the sixth century⁴⁶⁴. Justin I (518-527) taking advantage of the common religion established relations with the remote Kingdom of Axsum⁴⁶⁵. He was involved in the conflict that broke out between the Axomites and the Hymarites -located east wards of Yemen- by providing the former with the Byzantine commercial fleet that stationed in the Red Sea and Indian Ocean⁴⁶⁶. Then, Justinian aiming at securing the direct shipment of silk – and other products – through the sea Silk Road and circumventing the intermediation of the Persians concluded an alliance with the Kingdom of Axum in order to purchase silk from India (Ceylon)⁴⁶⁷ and sell it in the Roman Empire. The particular alliance would be beneficial for both contracting parties since the Axomites would gain much money and the Byzantines would be no longer compelled to capital flows to their enemy⁴⁶⁸. In spite of the Axomites promises it was impossible for them to compete the Persians, who would arrive first to the Indian harbors and markets, due to the proximity of their county, and buy off the merchandise⁴⁶⁹. However, the Sassanids blockaded the Byzantine access to the sea Route after the seizure of Yemen (571), which came as riposte to the exchange of Byzantine- Türk embassies⁴⁷⁰.

⁴⁶³ Vaissière 2005, 233: “on the subject of the defeat of the Sassanid king Peroz at the hands of the Hephthalites in 484”. See also Κορδῶσης 2012, 85.

⁴⁶⁴ Zacharias of Mitylene, VII.3, 151-152: “What the kingdom of the Persians gives to us by way of tribute is not sufficient to us Barbarians [. . .] and the king of the Romans has promised by his ambassadors to give us twice as much tribute whenever we shall dissolve our friendship with you Persians”

⁴⁶⁵ For an overall review of Byzantine-Ethiopian relations during Justin I’ reign see Vasiliev 1950, 282-302.

⁴⁶⁶ Vasiliev 1950, 296; Zhang 1998, 214.

⁴⁶⁷ Κορδῶσης 2002, 183: “In the era of Cosmas Indicopleustes large quantities of silk were being accumulated in Ceylon before and they were transferred to the West”

⁴⁶⁸ Procopius *History of the Wars*, I.20. 11-12.

⁴⁶⁹ Procopius *History of the Wars*, I.20. 11-12; Κορδῶσης 2002, 183-184 and 1996, 151-152; Zhang (1998a, 215) attributes the Ethiopian failure to act as Byzantium intermediaries in silk purchase to their unwillingness to be engaged in a conflict with the Persians. Instead of that they probably came in agreement with the Byzantines’ enemies to partition the eastern commerce according to which the Ethiopians might have the control over the spice trade while the Persians would maintain their monopoly over the silk commerce.

⁴⁷⁰ Theophanes Byzantius, 3, 270; Κορδῶσης 2012, 274; Vaissière 2005, 229.

The Persian monopoly over the silk trade in both the central Silk Road and the sea Route urged the Byzantines to think the northern branch of the Silk Route as a possible way through which they could acquire the valuable material without the Persian mediation⁴⁷¹. In the meantime the Türks accumulated great quantities of silk, coming from China. In fact from the beginning of the Türk- Chinese contacts (545) the Türks imposed disadvantageous trade arrangements for China since the latter was enforced to batter silk for the Türk livestock in order to buy peace at its frontier⁴⁷². As a consequence, the Türks became more aggressive in order to develop silk trade and gain the control over the central Silk Road⁴⁷³. Allied with the Persians, they disintegrated the Hephthalite kingdom and took the possession of Sogdiana. The Sogdians acknowledging the suzerainty of the Türks played the role of the counsellors as they were experienced in silk traffic⁴⁷⁴.

Despite the fact that the Persians and the Sogdians had separated the areas of their influence⁴⁷⁵, the Sogdians attempted to establish themselves in the Persian commercial areas. As it was aforementioned, they proposed their overlords to send an embassy to the Persians requesting their permission to sell raw silk in their land. The Persian refusal was justified due to the fact that Khosro I was determined to maintain silk monopoly over his territory since there were a powerful merchant class that made profit by supplying the Byzantine markets with this luxurious material. Had he accepted the Türko-Sogdian proposal he would have permitted the Türks to sell silk directly to the Persian customers⁴⁷⁶, losing the advantage the Persians had as intermediaries. The unsuccessful delegation to the Sassanids compelled the Türks to look for another market. Following the Sogdians' advice they attempted to establish relations with Byzantium in order to sell them directly their silk stock.

The conclusion of a Byzantine-Türk alliance (568) was a unique opportunity for both contracting parties in economic terms. On the one hand the Byzantines did not have to rely on the Persians who regulated the silk traffic (prices, quantities) at their

⁴⁷¹ For the three branches of the Northern Silk Route see Zhang 1998b 125-132.

⁴⁷² Ecsedy 1968, 141-142.

⁴⁷³ Harmatta- Litvinsky 1996, 359.

⁴⁷⁴ Vaissière 2005, 199. The Sogdians were not only intermediaries but also producers. See Κορδώνης 2012, 269; Xinru 2010, 84.

⁴⁷⁵ Vaissière 2005, 183.

⁴⁷⁶ Sinor 1969, 104-105.

will. By breaking Persian monopoly on silk imports by means of the Türk silk, the Byzantines were able to regulate prices in their markets. On the other hand the Türks broke the Persian monopoly of silk trade and managed to find access to the western market where they could sell their product. When the Persians realized the meaning of this development, they set up an ambush for Zemarchus' delegation on their way to Constantinople, but they failed.

The Byzantine-Türk alliance gave a fresh impetus to trade along the northern Silk Route. Crimea became a commercial center of a great importance since it was the western terminus of the northern Silk Road⁴⁷⁷. In fact, it is likely that the Türks aiming at having under their complete control the northern branch of the Silk Route occupied Crimea (576) and besieged Cherson⁴⁷⁸. Moreover, the Türks' vassals, the Sogdians, were content as they could expand their businesses westwards and increase their income⁴⁷⁹. Also, new trade centers like Samarkand and commercial communities⁴⁸⁰ were developed as a result of the intense economic transactions. However, the difficult terrain through the deserts to the north of the Caspian Sea and Volga led the Türks to launch a military expedition (569-570) against the Persian part of the former Hephthalite kingdom in order to take the possessions of the already existing facilities of transport⁴⁸¹.

⁴⁷⁷ Kopδώσης 2014, 273.

⁴⁷⁸ Kopδώσης 2008, 272-273.

⁴⁷⁹ Kopδώσης 2012, 273-274.

⁴⁸⁰ Eg. the 106 Türks who dwelt in Constantinople and returned to their homeland with Valentine's delegation. See Kopδώσης 2012, 274; Zhang 1998a, 290.

⁴⁸¹ Harmatta- Litvinsky 1996, 360: "However, the Sasanians did not renounce their claim to eastern Iran nor did the Hephthalites abandon their aspirations for independence."

3.3. Repercussions on the Balkan front

By 560s more than two hundred years had passed since the last Hunnic invasion into Roman lands. The devastation caused by the Huns and their nomadic confederation must have remained deeply engraved into the memories of the Byzantines and must have been a constant reminder to the administrators of the empire of the fragility and porosity of their northern frontiers. A system of checks and balances had therefore been developed on the part of the empire, relying mainly on diplomacy. The Byzantine diplomats used a wide range of means⁴⁸² such as bribes, valuable gifts, bestowal of titles taken from the hierarchy of the Byzantine court, subsidies, development of trade relations, land concessions and the diffusion of Christian faith⁴⁸³ in order to induce its northern neighbors and bring them into the empire's orbit. Apart from the abovementioned means, the Byzantines diplomatist were excellent at instigating one barbarian tribe against another in order to ward off their power and make them impotent to attack the Empire⁴⁸⁴. The implementation of the particular tactic was vital for the Empire seeing that a certain neighboring tribe was undertaking to defend the northern borders of Byzantium from other barbarian attacks, while the major corps of the Byzantine were occupied with the long-lasting wars against Persia.

Justinian I and his successors could wage a full-scale warfare on the eastern frontier on condition that they had first managed to build a favorable balance of power in the Ukraine steppes by exploiting the differences between the people who lived there⁴⁸⁵. Thus, Justinian I welcomed the first Avar embassy dispatched to the Byzantine court in 558 and urged the tribe to take up arms against the Empire's enemies in exchange for valuable gifts. After the conclusion of the alliance, the Avars crushed the Unigurs, the Zali the Sabirs and the Antae⁴⁸⁶ while Justinian was more

⁴⁸² Obolensky 1963, 45-61; Chrysos, 1992, 27-39; Shepard 1992, 40-70, Nooman, 1992, 117-123; Κυριάκης 1993, 45-46; Παπασωτηρίου 2001, 65-66, 105-108.

⁴⁸³ Πατούρα-Σπανού 2008, 231-273.

⁴⁸⁴ Obolensky 1963, 60.

⁴⁸⁵ Eg, Justinian aiming at having the Kutrigurs and Utigurs under his control without using manpower he stirred up strife between them (551-559) See Procopius *History of the Wars*, VIII.1; Obolensky 1971, 47.

⁴⁸⁶ Menander, 5.2, 50-51: "οἶμαι, προμηθευσάμενος ὁ βασιλεὺς, ὡς ἡ νικῶντες οἱ Ἄβαροι ἢ καὶ ἡσώμενοι ἐξ ἀμφοῖν πορίσῃσι Ῥωμαίοις τὸ συνοῖσον.

preoccupied with the eastern front until the signing of the Byzantine-Persian treaty in 562⁴⁸⁷.

Despite the initial friendly contacts between Constantinople and the Avars, the latter gradually became uncontrollable and a great threat for the empire by invading its northern borders whenever their demands were not fulfilled. After a short stay to the north of Caucasus, the Avars moved to the Lower Danube, probably because they were facing Türk menace in their rear⁴⁸⁸ and settled to the north-east of the river (561/562)⁴⁸⁹ from where they launched attacks against the Byzantine empire⁴⁹⁰. The Avar embassies of 562 and 565⁴⁹¹ raised their demands as they requested respectively Scythia Minor to be their permanent settlement and an increase in their payments in return for their service as the defenders of the Byzantine frontier, basically from the Slavs. Although the Avar embassies tried to intimidate the Byzantine emperors, their demands were rejected. Especially, Justin II was so determined not to follow Justinian I's policy of buying off the northern *barbarians* that he haughtily declared to them that he would never need an alliance with the Avars⁴⁹².

It seems that Justin II turned down the Avar requests because he could not count on their help when they would be needed to protect Byzantine interests in the Southern Russian steppes since they moved to the Lower Danube⁴⁹³. Moreover, it is likely that Justin's attitude is related to the fact that the Türks of the western wing of the Türk khanate had already come in contact with the Byzantines in 563 aiming at establishing good relations with the Empire and averting any possible alliance with the Avars who were considered to be their runaway subjects⁴⁹⁴. So, it is probable that Justin II took into account the Türk proposal, as according to Theophanes Byzantius, he denied the Avars access to the lands of Pannonia⁴⁹⁵ due to the previous Byzantine-

⁴⁸⁷ For the terms of the treaty see Menander, 6.1, 60-63 and 70-75; Greatrex-Lieu 2002, 131-133.

⁴⁸⁸ Καρδαράς 2010, 40.

⁴⁸⁹ Νυσταζοπούλου-Πελεκίδου 1992, 48; Νυσταζοπούλου-Πελεκίδου 1970, 147; Obolenky 1971, 49.

⁴⁹⁰ Theophanes Confessor, 236-237: "τῷ δὲ Ἀπριλίῳ μηνὶ παρελήφθη καὶ ἡ Ἀναστασιούπολις τῆς Θράκης ὑπὸ τῶν αὐτῶν Οὐννων. Καρδαράς 2010, 40-41.

⁴⁹¹ Menander, 5.3, 50-53, 94-95.

⁴⁹² Menander, 8, 94-95.

⁴⁹³ Καρδαράς 2010, 44.

⁴⁹⁴ Καρδαράς 2010, 44-45.

⁴⁹⁵ According to Κορδῶσης (2008, 105) Justin II might have rejected the request of the Avar embassy of 565 to be given Pannonia to dwell due to the fact that Theophanes Byzantius places the Türk delegation before the Avar settlement at the particular lands (567).

Türk agreement⁴⁹⁶. Thus, the embassy of 563 was a delegation on the part of the Türks as they aimed at assessing the possibility of co-operation with Byzantium against the Avars⁴⁹⁷, while the Byzantines, through the particular alliance, were probably seeking to recruit the Türks as potential allies, who may rebuild the balance of power at the empire's northern frontier and act as a counterweight to the Avar territorial ambitions and greediness.

The Byzantine-Türk alliance over the northern front continued, despite their short-term degradation which took place in 576. The cause of this development was the signing of the treaty (574) between the Byzantines and the Avars. The Byzantines (576) sent Valentine to request the Türks' help since the Persians invaded Byzantine Armenia destroying towns and cities⁴⁹⁸. Instead of giving the required help the Türks accused the Byzantines of being deceitful seeing that they violated the terms of the treaty and allow the *Varchonitae* to settle within the Roman territory. Then, the Türks, taking advantage of the ostensible "violation" of the particular agreement, besieged the city of Bosphorus aiming actually at capturing the whole Crimea, which was the terminus of the northern Silk route. Apparently, Turxantus meant the agreement of 563 according to which the Byzantines were not supposed to offer refuge to the Avars⁴⁹⁹. Nevertheless, despite Turxantus' allegations the Byzantines did not succumb to the recurrent requests of the Avar embassies until 574, when they were defeated by them in the field. Moreover, the Byzantines still honored the Byzantine-Türk alliance (568) since they were engaged in a strenuous war against the Persians. Consequently, the Byzantines had not violated the terms of any treaty. They were just unable to enforce it due to the fact that they had to fight on two fronts.

As long as the Persian war dragged on, Tiberius was unable to defend the Empire from the Slavs and the Avars as he had stripped the Balkans of troops. Moreover, his policy of the Avar appeasing seemed to have failed seeing that in 579 the Avars under the pretext of preparing to launch a campaign against the Slavs,

⁴⁹⁶ Theophanes Byzantius, 2, 270: "Τοῖς δὲ Ἀβάροις ὕστερον ἐλθοῦσι, καὶ Παννονίαν οἰκῆσαι καὶ εἰρήνης τυχεῖν δεομένοις, διὰ τὸν πρὸς τοὺς Τούρκους λόγον καὶ τὰς συνθήκας οὐκ ἐσπέισατο." See also Καρδαράς 2010, 44-45; Κορδώσης 2008, 103-106.

⁴⁹⁷ Kordoses 2011a, 298.

⁴⁹⁸ Whitby 1988, 264.

⁴⁹⁹ Κορδώσης 2012, 130.

constructed a bridge across the river Sava in order to be used for the siege of Sirmium. At this difficult juncture the Byzantines took advantage of the Türk presence in Crimea peninsula and tried to intimidate the Avars to postpone the assaults against the Slavs by telling them that the Türks might attack them from the north⁵⁰⁰. In addition, it is possible that Tiberius sent a delegation to the Türks (579) to request their help for the defense of Sirmium. Nevertheless, in spite of all his efforts, Sirmium fell to the Avars in 582.

The treaty that was concluded after the fall of Sirmium and acknowledged by Maurice lasted for two years. The Avars broke the treaty when the emperor rejected their demands for an increase in tribute. After capturing the cities of Singidunum, Viminacium and Augustae, they ravaged as far as Anchialus from where they fell back to Sirmium due to the Türk raids in their territories⁵⁰¹. It seems that the Türks were instigated by Maurice⁵⁰², who probably had dispatched an embassy (584) to request their help in order to repulse the Avars from the Byzantine territories. Although the Türks did not annihilate the Avars as they used to declare⁵⁰³ they withdrew their forces after being paid with eight centenaria of gold. Consequently, the capture of the city of Bosphorus was a short breach in the Byzantine- Türk relations while the Türk involvement in the Balkans proved crucial for the survival of the Byzantine empire taking into account that the Byzantines were unable to confine the Avar aggressiveness.

As it can be inferred, during the reign of Maurice the relations between the Byzantines and the Türks were improved with tangible results on the Balkan Front. This is best proven by the epistle sent to emperor Maurice, sometime around 598, by the khagan of the Türks, via a Türk delegation. Unfortunately, Theophylactus preserved the general title of the *epistle celebrating the victory of the khagan over his enemies* but he doesn't give any precise information on its contents. We have no more information concerning the Balkan front in relation to the Byzantine-Türk alliance but it seems that it remained more or less stabilized until the reign of emperor Heraclius

⁵⁰⁰ Καρδαράς 2010, 66; . Κορδώσης 2011, 299; Κορδώσης 2012, 144;

⁵⁰¹ Καρδαράς 2010, 71; Κορδώσης 2012, 146.

⁵⁰² Καρδαράς 2010, 71; Κορδώσης 2012, 146.

⁵⁰³ Menander, 19.1, 174-175.

to the Byzantine throne in 610. It was during his reign that the two allies, Byzantines and Türks decided to finish off the Persians, through an epic war that started in 622 and it was this development that might stir the Balkan front, too.

Although Heraclius attempted to conclude peace treaties with the Avars (619 and 623)⁵⁰⁴ in exchange for large sums of money, the latter took advantage of the emperor's absence in the east and laid siege on Constantinople in cooperation with the Persians (626). Despite the fact that the details of the Avaro-Persian rapprochement were unknown, the two parts had come in consultation to attack Constantinople simultaneously⁵⁰⁵. However, the besiegers failed to conquer Constantinople.

The Avars never regained their power after their defeat before the walls of Constantinople. Somewhere around 635 Kuvrat, the leader of the Onogur Bulgars rebelled against the Avars and overthrown their authority⁵⁰⁶. So, after 626 the Avars Khanate in the Balkans was disintegrated and their power was increasingly limited to the Pannonian plains.⁵⁰⁷

3.3. Political Repercussions on the Middle Eastern front

If the Byzantino-Türk deal of 563 covered Byzantium's northern front, it was the 567 treaty with the Türks that covered its Middle Eastern struggle with the Persians. The territorial expansion of Persia and its growing strength during the reign of Khosro (531-579) forced the Byzantines to engage in large-scale diplomatic activity intending to form an anti-Persian coalition that would encircle the enemy⁵⁰⁸. The Türks who ended up having common frontiers with the Persians and being their enemies after the disintegration of the Hephthalite kingdom in the middle of 560s, might have been considered by the Byzantines as potential allies. Indeed, it was the Persians that turned the Türks towards the Byzantines, when they received in an unfriendly manner the two Türk delegations that they proposed to them a mutual co-operation regarding

⁵⁰⁴ Haldon 1990, 45; Καρδαράς 2010, 121.

⁵⁰⁵ *Chonicon Paschale*, 716-717; Nikephoros, 13, 58; Καρδαράς 2010, 121.

⁵⁰⁶ Haldon 1990, 47; Κυριάκης 1993, 46-47; Νυσταζοπούλου-Πελεκίδου 1992, 96.

⁵⁰⁷ Haldon 1990, 44; Whittow 1996, 263.

⁵⁰⁸ Ghirshman 1954, 305.

the silk trade and murdered some of the members of the second one. Four years later (end of 567 or beginning of 568) after the disruption of the diplomatic contacts between the Türks and the Persians, the Khagan Silzibul dispatched an embassy to Justin II aiming at establishing trade relations and political alliance with the Byzantines. From the terms of the alliance it becomes obvious that the Türks' main objectives were on the one hand to harm the Persian empire in economic and military terms⁵⁰⁹ and on the other to establish the Byzantine-Türk relations since they had mutual interests.

From the point of view of the Byzantines the alliance of 567 was a unique opportunity to bypass the Persians regarding the silk trade through their competitors and to annihilate Persia since both allies would launch attacks on its two fronts. Moreover, the emperor's questions regarding the Türk people or their vassals depict the Byzantine interest in the political situation of Central Asia for many of the *barbarian* tribes, who used to live there, came at Byzantium through the steppe corridor⁵¹⁰. In addition, the Türks might be used by the Byzantines for gathering intelligence concerning the people of Central Asia with whom the Persians had diplomatic contacts such as the Hephthalites⁵¹¹ in the past. In conclusion, the Byzantine- Türk alliance of 567 concerned the political and economic developments in Central Asia against the Persians and defined the context upon which the Byzantine-Türk diplomatic relations were built. At this point it is worth to be added that despite the fact that there was no reference to the terms of the agreement of 563 regarding the Byzantine refusal to offer refuge to the Avars, the particular issue was always concerned the Türk policy as it can be inferred from Turxanthus's saying. So, the particular request either was not included in Menander's narration or the Türk Khagan was pleased with the Byzantine maneuvers towards the Avars. Also, Silzibul might be interested only in how to deal with the Persians⁵¹², since the latter showed their hostile intentions by refusing an imminent coalition with the Türks and by killing some members of the Maniakhs' delegation.

⁵⁰⁹ Menander 1985, 116-117, n. 123, 236.

⁵¹⁰ Eg the Avars see Menander, 10.1, 114-117.

⁵¹¹ Κορδῶσης 2012, 84-85; Vaissière 2002, 229.

⁵¹² Κορδῶσης, 2012, 142.

In response to the Türk embassy, Justin II dispatched to the khagan a byzantine delegation headed by Zemarchus considering the promising prospects of a potential Byzantine -Türk alliance in economic and political terms. It was during this visit that the foundations of the Byzantine- Türk alliance were established as both contracting parties reaffirmed their friendship and devotion to each other⁵¹³. The first sign of the alliance was the participation of Zemarchus in a raid that the Türks carried into the eastern frontiers of Persia⁵¹⁴. Justin, as Menander puts it⁵¹⁵, believed that this new alliance would destroy the Persians since the latter had to wage war on two fronts in order to repulse the joint attacks. So, Justin encouraged by the Türks⁵¹⁶-it was probably the embassy led by Tagma that convey the message to the Byzantines to open a second front in the West⁵¹⁷ - demonstrated his commitment to the terms of the alliance. On the occasion of the Armenians appeals for the Byzantine protection, when they rebelled against the Persian rule, the emperor attacked Persia⁵¹⁸. In the following years until 575 there was an intense exchange of delegations from both sides which indicates that the Byzantine- Türk relations blossomed.

The pressure exercised by Byzantines and Türks over Persia remained constant, if one takes into consideration the information given by Tabari that during the years from 588-589 the Türks and the Byzantines exercised enormous pressure on Persia⁵¹⁹. Moreover, it seems that Sassanids and Türks were at each other's throat occasionally until their final confrontation within the context of Heraclius' wars. The new Tang chronicle reports that at the end of Sui dynasty (2nd decade of the 7 century) the (jabghou) khagan of the western Türks invaded and destroyed the

⁵¹³ Menander 1985, 118-119, 122-123.

⁵¹⁴ Dickens 2004, 55: "it may be a reference to the Türk invasion of Persia in 569 or merely the gradual southward expansion of the Türks into Central Asia and northern Afghanistan. Kopδώσης 2011, 297-298.

⁵¹⁵ Menander 13.5 146-147.

⁵¹⁶ Rubin 2008, 136: "Peace lasted for a decade, but on this occasion the Byzantines were the aggressors: Justin II (565–78) objected to paying for peace (at the rate of 30,000 solidi per year) and believed that he could count on the support of the Turkish confederation in Central Asia, which had replaced the Hephthalites as Persia's north-eastern neighbours, to crush their common enemy".

⁵¹⁷ Menander, 13.5, 146-147, n. 170, 269; Dickens 2004, 55; Kopδώσης 2012, 115; Whitby 1988, 251.

⁵¹⁸ Whitby 1988, 251; Treadgold 1997, 222: "Justin listened to appeals from the Armenians under the Persian rule, who were plotting rebellion and from the Turks of Central Asia, who were already raiding northern Persia".

⁵¹⁹ Kopδώσης 2010, 159.

kingdom of Khosro⁵²⁰. In addition, Theophanes mentions that Kavād Siroes had to sign a peace treaty with the Türks when he was crowned king⁵²¹. It seems from the above mentioned information that the Türks had already been engaged in war with the Persians and that the Byzantines, under Heraclius, entered the war as their allies, serving of course their own interests.

The participation of the Khazars in Heraclius' campaign as his allies can only be seen under the light of the Byzantine-Türk alliance. The Khazars, being a vassal nation to the Türks, stepped in with their 40000 warriors only to help the ally of their master. The fact that in 626, the Persians and the Avars laid siege on Constantinople simultaneously is an indirect proof that the Byzantine-Türk alliance affected these two nations (and consequently two separate regions – the Balkans and the Middle East) and for that both the Avars and the Persians were trying to break it, by removing one of the two participants in it (Byzantium)⁵²². However, Heraclius reinforced by the Khazar army instead of defending the Byzantine territories from the Persian assaults brought the war into his enemies' heartland. The Persian defeat in Nineveh (627) accelerated the collapse of the Sassanian empire and exposed the fragility of Khosro II's former achievements⁵²³.

The permanent conflict exhausted the adversaries who became almost incapable to defend their states from the new rising power of Islam. Notwithstanding, while the Byzantine empire used the Khazars as counterweight to the Arab aggressiveness, the Persian empire had nothing to fall back on. The destruction of the fertile lands in Mesopotamia caused by the campaigns, the people's overtaxation, the exhaustion of the army and the political instability due to the internal strives for the succession of the throne⁵²⁴ made the Sassanid empire unable to survive military defeat at the hands of the Arabs⁵²⁵. So, in 637 Ctesiphon was occupied by the

⁵²⁰ Κορδώσης 2012, 214.

⁵²¹ Theophanes Confessor, 316. Even in the case that the Türks of Theophanes were Khazars, as Stratos claims, (1966, 576), since the writer uses both names interchangeably, the Khazars followed the orders set by the Western Türks. See Κορδώσης 2012, 21-215.

⁵²² Καρδαράς 2010, 122: "Despite the fact that we don't know the details of the rapprochement of the two sides, the sources' accounts imply that they agreed on a joint attack from the west and east of Constantinople. See also Whittow 1996, 78.

⁵²³ Rubin 2008, 155.

⁵²⁴ For Khosro II's desposition see Pourshariati 2008, 153-155.

⁵²⁵ Brown 1971, 169-170.

victorious army of the Arabs and in 642 the Persian forces were thoroughly defeated at the battle of Nihavand⁵²⁶. Consequently, the Byzantine- Türk alliance achieved its objectives since the Persian empire was annihilated, but the price paid by the Byzantines was also high. By the mid of the seventh century, Byzantium's eastern provinces-Syria and Egypt-were incorporated into the Islamic caliphate⁵²⁷.

⁵²⁶ Frye 1983, 172.

⁵²⁷Whittow 1996, 86.

Conclusions

The Türks appeared at the foreground of the History as a mighty power after the overthrow of the Róurán yoke. Headed by members of the A-shih-na clan, they soon embarked on a series of military campaigns aiming at gaining the control over the Silk Road. They disintegrated the Hephthalite empire (ca. 560) through a joint action with the Persians and incorporated Sogdiana to their Khanate. After the failure to establish commercial footholds in Persia in order to sell their Chinese silk stock, they attempted to come in contact with Byzantium, which was the ultimate and most important silk consumer.

To this end, a Türk delegation led by the Sogdian Maniakh (567) was dispatched to the Byzantine court and proposed a trade agreement and a political alliance. The particular embassy was not the first one arrived at Constantinople since it is likely that the delegation of Kermichíōnes (563) was sent under the instructions of the Türk yabghou in order to prevent the Byzantines from offering refuge to the Avars. The Türk requests of Maniakh's embassy were granted by Justin II. From the Byzantines' point of view it was a first class opportunity to break the monopoly of silk trade controlled by the Persians since the latter regulated the prices and the quantity of the luxurious material. The alliance was equally beneficial for the Türks who could sell their product directly to the Byzantines bypassing their main competitors, the Persians. Another aspect of the Byzantine- Türk alliance was the fact that both allies aimed at placing Persia in the crossfire seeing that the Byzantine were engaged in the almost permanent conflict with the Persians and the Türk were interested in the appropriation of parts of the central Silk Road.

Justin anxious to secure for Byzantium a potential supplier of raw silk and a reliable ally operating in the rear of the Sassanid empire sent a Byzantine delegation headed by Zemarchus in response to the Türk one. It was during this visit that the Byzantine- Türk alliance was established. Zemarchus after his splendid reception he was allowed to follow a Türk campaign against the Persians. Apparently, in this way, Silzibul demonstrated his commitment to the terms of the alliance regarding his attitude towards the common enemy. When the Persians, realized that their eastern

and western frontiers were exposed to the allied forces, they tried to balance the situation by embarking a campaign in Felix Arabia in order to cut off the Byzantines from the sea Silk Route. The Byzantines, in turn, urged by the Türks launched attacks against the Persians (572) aiming at the encirclement of Persia.

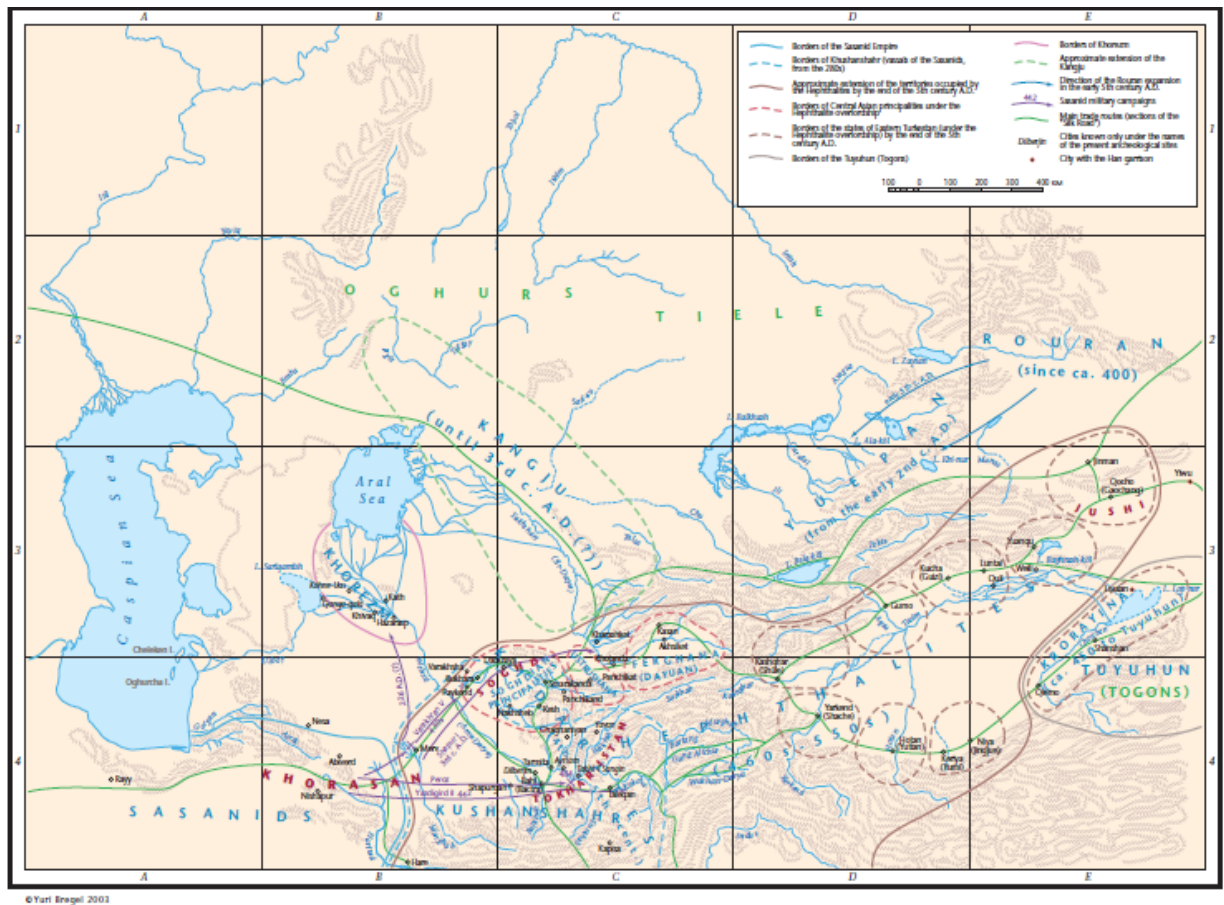
Despite the frequent diplomatic exchanges from 568 to 576 the Byzantine-Türk relations became strained as it can be deduced by the hostile reception of Valentine's delegation. The main reason for the Türk discontent was the fact that the Byzantines offered refuge to the Avars who were the Türks' subjects. However, the Byzantines honored the Byzantine-Türk agreement seeing that on the one hand they were engaged in a war with the Persians and on the other they did not succumb to the Avar pressure for their permanent settlement in the Byzantine lands until the treaty of 574. Thus, it seems that the Türks' objectives changed regarding the bilateral agreement. Having under their control the eastern and the central part of the northern Silk Route, the Türks probably aimed at conquering Crimea, which was westernmost end of the steppe Silk route in order to secure silk traffic at their own benefit. Therefore, they used the supposed Byzantine noncompliance with the terms of the alliance as a pretext in order to justify the hostile attitude toward their former allies.

In spite of the strained relations, it is likely that Byzantium sent two delegations (during the reign of Tiberius and Maurice) to the Türks in order to request their help to defend the empire's Balkan frontiers. As it can be inferred from the sources, the Türks responded to the Byzantine appeals by attacking the Avars in their rear and obliging them to fall back to Sirmium (584). Therefore, the Byzantine-Türk relations were improved before the withdrawal of the Türks from Crimea. The letter of the Türk khagan sent to Maurice (598) can be explained in this context. Since Tardu became the uncontested leader of the western Türks after the internal strifes, he wanted to demonstrate his triumphs to his allies, who were launching victorious campaigns against the Persians for the time being.

Seeing that the Avars withdrew to the Hungarian plains after their failure to capture Constantinople (626), the allied forces concentrated on the annihilation of Persia. The two allies cooperated to encircle the common enemy as during the last years of the Byzantine-Persian wars, the Persians had an open military front with the Türks. The Byzantine - Türk alliance was reaffirmed by the participation of the Türks in

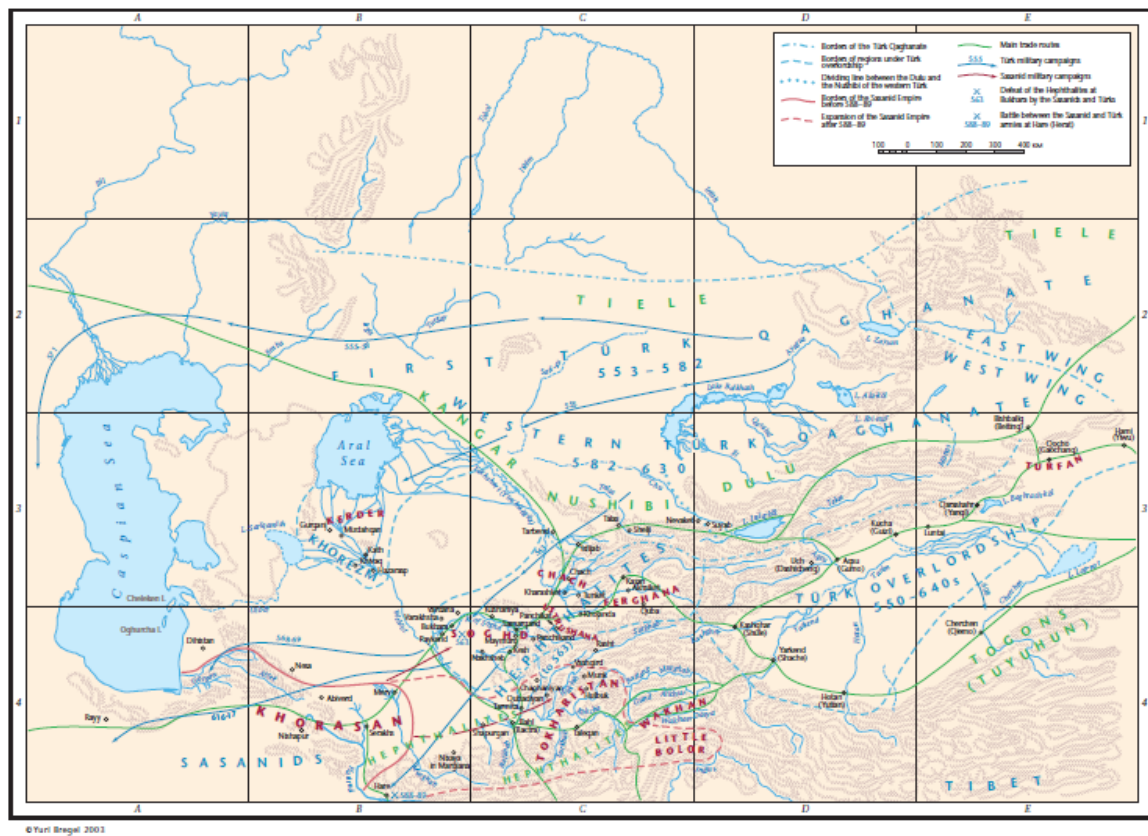
the last phase of Heraclius' campaign (626-628) through the Khazars, who were their vassals. The Khazars, who were under the western Türks' control, played a vital role in Heraclius' victory over the Persians. The allied forces inflicted a severe blow to the Persian empire from which it never recovered. Thus, the objectives of the Byzantine-Türk alliance achieved since the Balkans were relieved from the Avar aggressiveness and the Persian empire submitted to the new rising power of Islam, exhausted by the protracted wars.

Maps



Map.1: 3rd-6th centuries A.D.: The Sassanids, Kidarites, the Hephthalites and the Rourán.

Reproduced from Bregel 2003, 13.

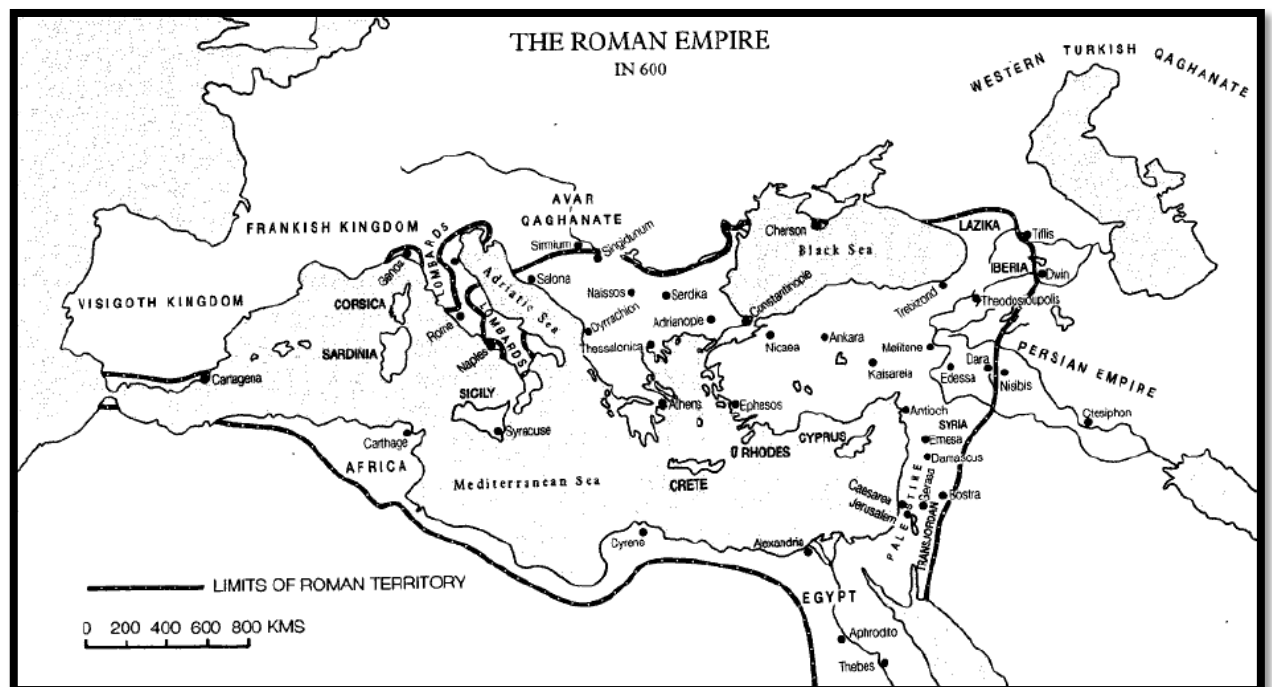


Map 2: 6th-7th centuries A.D.: The Sassanids and the first Türk Khanate.

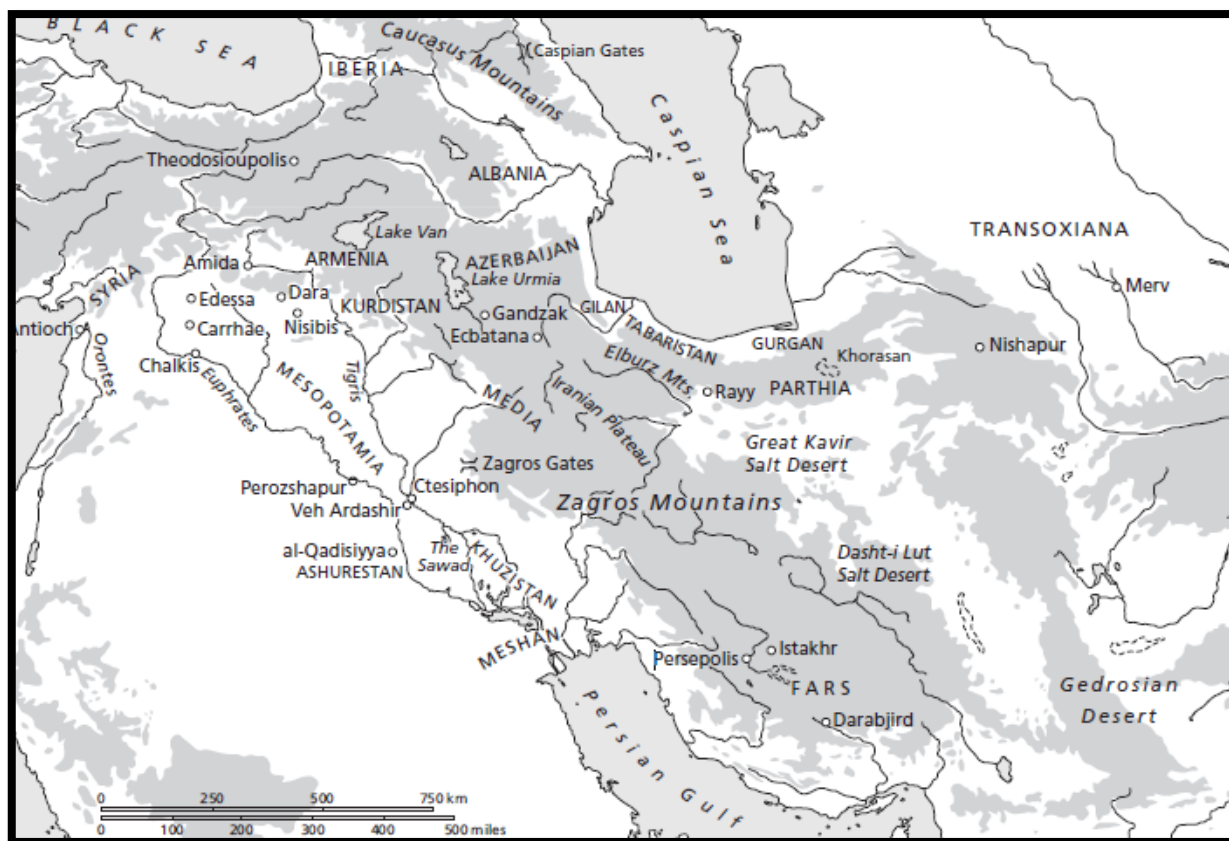
Reproduced from Bregel 2003, 15.



Map 3: The Türk Khanates. Reproduced from Golden 1992, 154.



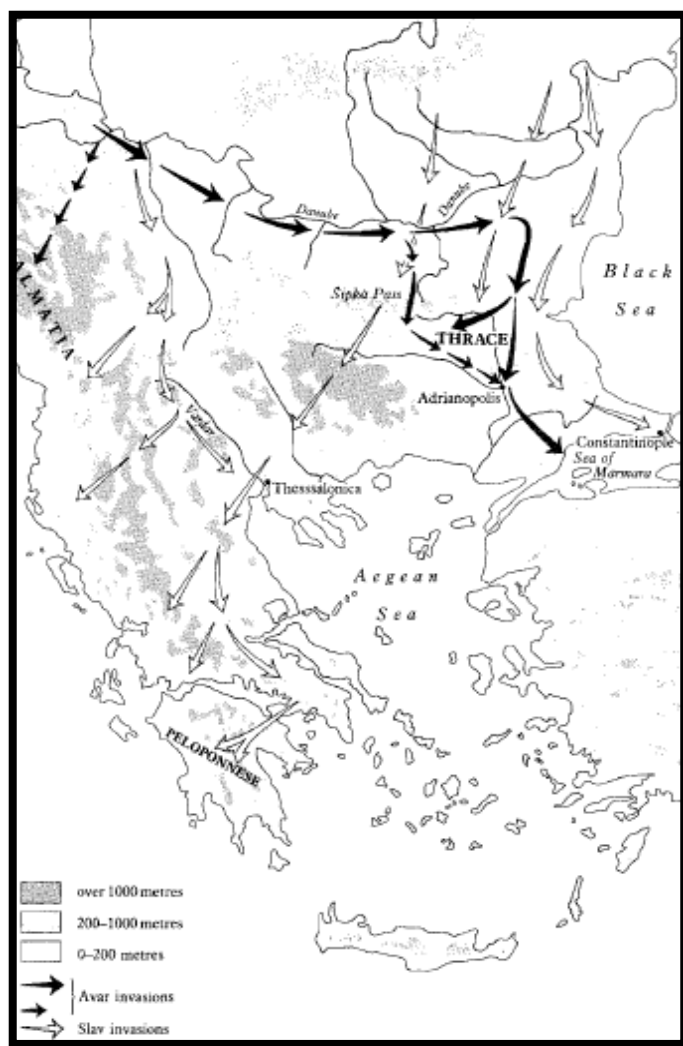
Map 4: The Byzantine empire in the 6th century. Reproduced from Whittow 1996, 39.



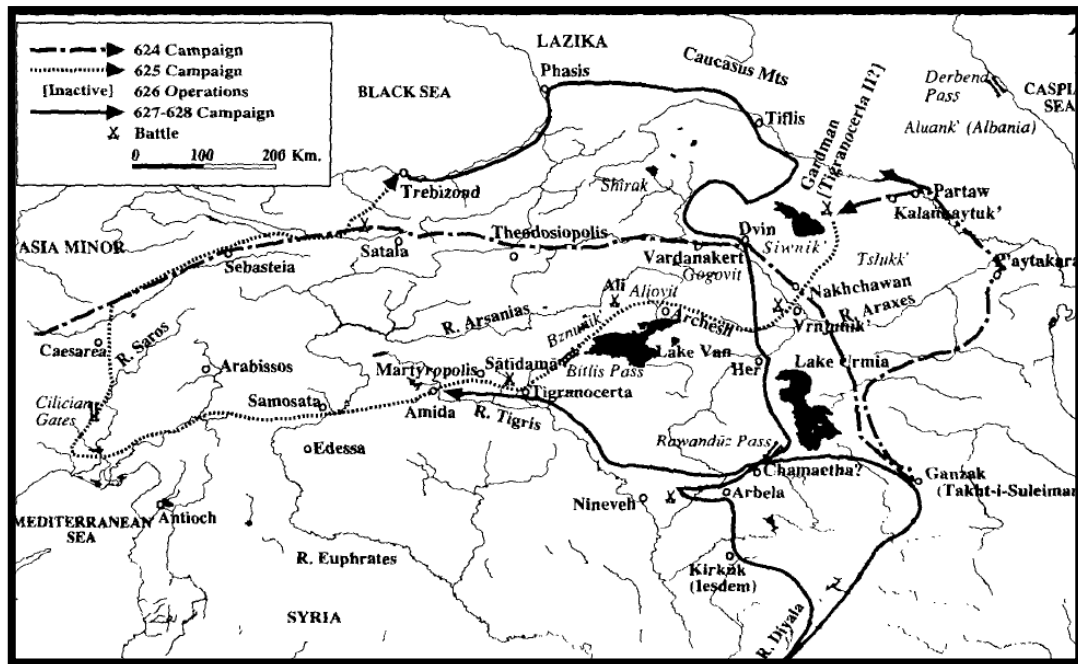
Map 5: The Sasanian empire in the 6th century. Reproduced from Rubin 2008, 131.



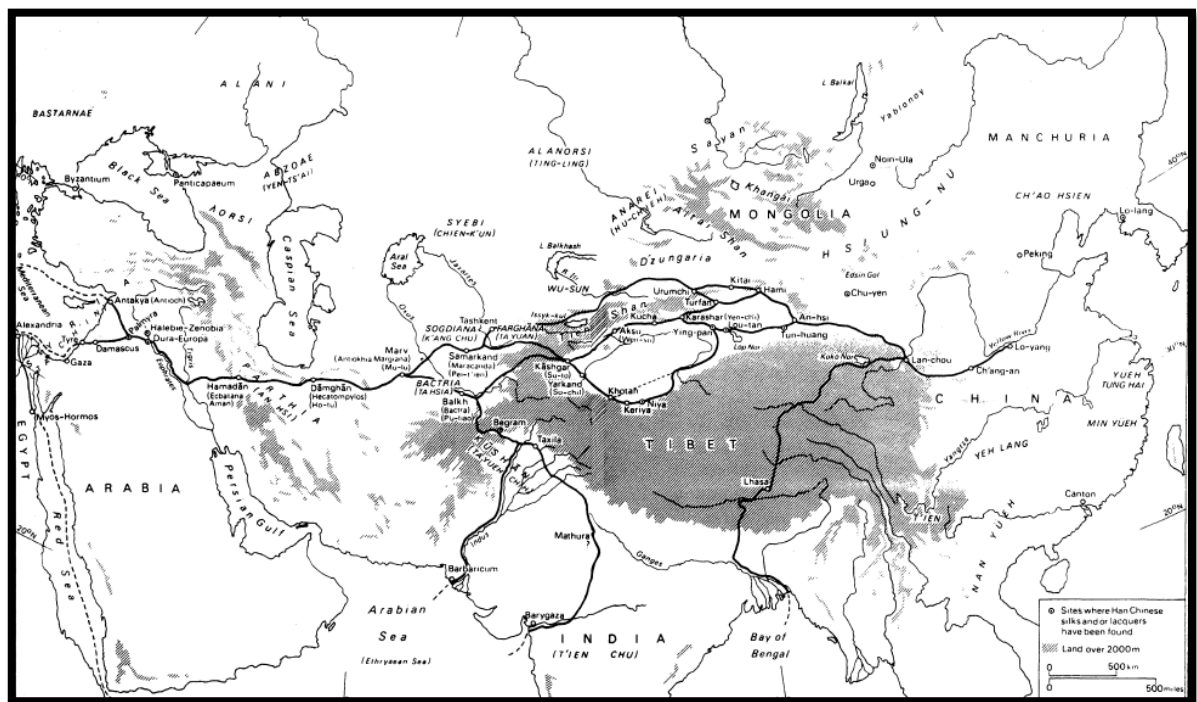
Map 6: The Byzantine- Persian frontiers after the Byzantine gains in Armenia (591). Reproduced from Greatrex-Lieu 2002, xxx.



Map 7: The Balkans: Invasion routes. Reproduced from Whitby 1988, 170.



Map 8: Heraclius' campaign against Sassanian armies, 624-628. Reproduced from Kaegi 2003, 1223.



Map 9: The Silk Roads from China to the Roman Orient. Reproduced from Watson 1983, 543.